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ABSTRACT

The document, one in a series of four on women in American history, discusses the role of women during and after the Civil War (1860-1890). Designed to supplement high school U.S. history textbooks, the book is comprised of five chapters. Chapter I describes the work of Union and Confederate women in the Civil War. Topics include the army nursing service, women in the military, and women who assumed the responsibilities of their absent husbands. Chapter II focuses on black and white women educators for the freed slaves during the Reconstruction Era. Excerpts from diaries reveal the experiences of these teachers. Chapter III describes women on the Western frontier. Again, excerpts from letters and diaries depict the Lewis and Clark guide, Sacajawea; pioneer missionaries adjusting to frontier life; and the experiences of women on the Western trail. Employment and equality on the frontier are also discussed. Chapter IV notes the progress of women after the Civil War. Although women were still excluded from political leadership, they began participating more actively in industry, education, and the professions. Topics include women in law, medicine, science, and architecture. Chapter V focuses on women's organizations: labor, the suffrage movement, and social clubs. Questions and suggested activities are found at the end of each chapter. (KC)

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Women in American History: A Series

Book Three

Women During and After the Civil War

1860 - 1890

by

Beverly Sanders

American Federation of Teachers

Women's Educational Equity Act Program

U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
Joseph A. Califano, Jr., Secretary

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Office of Education
Ernest L. Boyer, Commissioner

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INTRODUCTION

Women in American History, a four-part series, attempts to fill a serious gap in the American history curriculum as taught in most United States high schools today. Surveys of the most widely used American history textbooks repeatedly turn up the astonishing fact that these books almost totally neglect the lives and achievements of American women. Although the revival of a feminist movement in the 1960's and 1970's has resulted in a proliferation of women's studies courses at the college level and a flood of books dealing with the history of women, very little of this material has been adapted to the secondary school level, except where individual teachers have initiated courses of their own.

During the year in which I developed the series--a process that included visiting several schools and testing the material in the classroom--I realized that the average social studies classroom was unaffected by the growing and much publicized interest in women's studies. The same standard textbooks were still being used, and no supplementary material on women seemed to be available. (It should be said that some of the publishers of the venerable textbooks are producing auxiliary pamphlets on American minority groups, among whom women are included, to supplement their standard fare.) When quizzed, few students were able to name more than one outstanding American woman who had lived before 1900. (Their response was usually Harriet Tubman; black studies has made its mark.) Most of the teachers I worked with were eager to integrate material on women into their American history courses and were grateful for whatever material I could put directly into the hands of their students. Other teachers were indifferent and would be unlikely to teach such material unless they were directed to do so. The students were usually very interested, particularly in material that presented women as fighters for social justice, such as that relating to the antislavery speakers of the 1830's. As might have been expected, women students showed greater interest and enthusiasm than men. Yet the latter, even when openly hostile to women's claims for historical recognition, seemed stimulated by the material and eager to engage in discussion.

Each book in the series is a narrative of women's lives and accomplishments within a significant epoch of American history--an epoch normally studied in the standard history survey. There are, naturally, chapters devoted to women who were famous in their time, although many of these women had been virtually forgotten until the recent revival of feminism. Often the more well-known figures were reformers--abolitionists, temperance workers, crusaders for the mentally ill, etc.--reform work being the one public arena open to women, who were virtually barred from politics before the 20th century. Others earned fame and fortune in literary work, since writing was traditionally one of the few professions that could be practiced at home. There is, of course, considerable attention devoted to the women--women's rights advocates, suffragists, educators--who dedicated their lives to achieving equality for women.

It would be distorting women's history, however, to concentrate exclusively on the famous and the exceptional. Throughout our nation's history, most women, conforming to widely held religious and social views of their role, have lived anonymous lives as wives, mothers and unsung workers. Therefore, I have tried to devote roughly equal space to the lives and accomplishments of these "ordinary" women, whose names were not well known, but whose experiences have, fortunately, been recorded in diaries, letters, newspaper pieces and other documents that have been preserved. I hope each book sufficiently stresses that women have always been a vital part of America's labor force. On farms and in factories, women were there from the start: exploited and invisible, but making the wheels go round. Though the important economic role of women seems obvious, it was not always fully recognized and valued, especially during eras when it was popular to view the ideal woman as a nonworker, except for domestic chores. For each epoch, I have tried to show what conditions--economic, political, social and legal--advanced women toward equality with men or retarded their progress in that direction.

Although my intention was to produce a historical narrative and not a collection of documents, I have tried to include ample selections from primary sources whenever that seemed the best way to capture the flavor of certain periods and personalities. In my view, most secondary school textbooks offer too small a taste of primary sources, no doubt because the vocabulary and writing style of our 17th, 18th and 19th century ancestors are considered too difficult for the teenaged reader of today. To the contrary, I have found from my experiments with these materials that students will respond to authenticity when they find it, even if the language is difficult. Even slow readers will struggle through the rhetoric of an Angelina Grimke once they sense the woman's power and passionate devotion to an ideal of justice.

It has been noted that women's history generally falls into the increasingly popular disciplines of social and economic history, rather than the more traditional categories of political, diplomatic and military history. I would hope that exposure to the history of American women might awaken in high school students--male and female alike--an awareness that social and economic history exists and that it can have meaning for their lives. The emphasis in women's history on how people live and work might cause students to realize that history is about people like themselves--that their own lives, however obscure, contain the very stuff of history. The themes of women's history have, in my view, the potential for stimulating students' interest in history and for enriching and humanizing what for many young people might otherwise be a remote and abstract field of study.

CHAPTER ONE

AMERICAN WOMEN IN THE CIVIL WAR

The Civil War brought challenge and change into the lives of American women. As all wars have done, to some extent, it released women from a restricted domestic role and enabled them to find a broader scope for their energies and their idealism. From the moment the guns fired on Fort Sumter, women of North and South eagerly sought to play a role in the national conflict.

WOMEN OF THE UNION

The Sanitary Commission

In the interim between the firing on Fort Sumter and the first battle of Bull Run, women of the North rapidly formed soldiers' aid societies to do relief work. They collected lint (used in packing wounds), made bandages, sewed hospital garments, knitted socks and collected food and other supplies for the wounded. Realizing the need to coordinate spontaneous grass-roots activity, Elizabeth Blackwell, America's first woman doctor, began an organizing effort that led by June 1861, to the founding of the United States Sanitary Commission. Although it was headed by men, as custom demanded, the Sanitary Commission, which became an indispensable part of the Union medical services, was a woman's organization. And its women did almost everything but fight the war! All over the North and Midwest, thousands of women--administrators and rank and file--engaged in the countless activities of the "Sanitary," and raised, by the end of the war, the staggering sum of $50 million for its work. They recruited army nurses, provided vital supplies--bandages, medicine, supplementary food, clothing--to the army hospitals and camps, set up and maintained hospital ships and relief camps, helped the wounded find their way home and tried to locate the missing in action.

The Sanitary Commission gave thousands of women their first taste of work outside the home. Women who had executive ability and a flair for public speaking went from responsible positions in the Sanitary to careers in reform causes, such as women's suffrage, after the war. One such woman was Mary Livermore, who, with a friend, Jane C. Hoge, headed the Chicago Sanitary Commission, making that branch into one of the most effective in the whole country. About 3,000 local aid societies were founded in the Midwest as a result of Livermore's speaking tours. When Grant's army was threatened with scurvy in 1863, she and her co-workers collected 18,000 bushels of vegetables, 3,000 cans of fruit and 61,000 pounds of dried fruit and shipped them rapidly southward to Vicksburg. She investigated conditions in army hospitals, delivered supplies and involved herself personally with the problems of wounded soldiers. Along with Hoge, Livermore conducted the great Sanitary Fair of October 1863, which raised more than $470,000 and became the model for many other such fairs held by women in different cities.

Nurses

Many women, yearning to be closer to the action, volunteered as army nurses. We should remember that though women were expected to nurse the sick at home, nursing was not yet a respectable profession for women, and there were very few trained nurses in the United States. (It was only after the Civil War that training schools for nurses were established and nursing became one of the "women's professions." Recognizing this problem, Elizabeth Blackwell and her sister Emily Blackwell, who was also a doctor, set up a special training program for nurses at their New York Infirmary for Women and Children.

The task of organizing the army nursing service fell to Dorothea Dix--now close to sixty years old--who had worked for twenty years as a lone crusader for the mentally ill. She offered her services as soon as the war broke out and was commissioned Superintendent of Army Nurses with the responsibility for appointing and supervising all army nurses. Her requirements for the nurses she recruited were rigid--one can easily imagine the dismay of many young women at some of her more arbitrary demands:

> No woman under thirty need apply to serve in government hospitals. All nurses are required to be plain looking women. Their dresses must be brown or black, with no bows, no curls, no jewelry, and no hoop skirts.[1]

Dix was obliged to relax some of her requirements as the war dragged on, the numbers of wounded soldiers swelled and the need for nurses became more desperate. She also took upon herself the tasks of setting up infirmaries in Washington, sending out calls for supplies and inspecting military hospitals in Washington and at the army camps. Inevitably, Dorothea Dix clashed with the army doctors because of her perhaps impossibly high standards--at a time when standards of medical practice and sanitation were none too high--and her quickness to criticize what she regarded as incompetence in doctors and nurses. Her utter inability to delegate responsibility, even for the distribution of supplies, can be seen in some of the memos to her which survive:

> Miss Dix, will you be so kind as to let me have... an India rubber cloth and pillow to the head, also some of those pillows you spoke of to put under a patient with bed sores.
>
> Please send 2 oranges and a little tea, good bread for Ward 7.
>
> Please let the bearer have a few potatoes or a little fruit for a convalescent.[2]

Despite personality conflicts and challenges to her authority, Dorothy Dix stuck to her post every single day for the entire four years of the war, doing much to create decent and calm hospital conditions and ease the sufferings of wounded and dying men.

"She is a kind old soul, but very queer and arbitrary," wrote one of Dix's recruits, Louisa May Alcott. Thirty years old, restless, brimming with "pent-up energy," the future author of Little Women found in Civil War nursing an outlet for her energies as well as a vivid subject for literature. Her slightly fictionalized account of her nursing experiences, Hospital Sketches (1836), conveys the chaotic hospital conditions, the pathos of the wounded men as well as the cheerfulness and compassion of Louisa herself. Three days after her arrival at "Hurley-burley House," Alcott's nickname for the former hotel converted into an army hospital, Nurse "Periwinkle," as she calls herself, is suddenly in charge of a ward containing forty beds

> where I spent my shining hours washing faces, serving rations, giving medicine, and sitting in a very hard chair, with pneumonia on one side, diphtheria on the other, five typhoids on the opposite, and a dozen dilapidated patriots, hopping, lying, and lounging about.[3]

Though she had been longing to nurse the wounded rather than the merely sick, it was a shock to encounter the sights and smells of the wounded soldiers pouring in after the battle of Fredericksburg:

> The first thing I met was a regiment of the vilest odors that ever assaulted the human nose, and took it by storm... There they were! "our brave boys," as the papers justly call them, for cowards could hardly have been so riddled with shot and shell, so torn and shattered, nor have borne suffering... with an uncomplaining fortitude, which made one glad to cherish each as a brother. In they came, some on stretchers, some in men's arms, some feebly staggering along propped on rude crutches and one lay stark and still with covered face, as a comrade gave his name to be recorded before they carried him away to the dead-house.[4]

Alcott stood by the men during amputations, bathed them, changed the bandages, dressed the wounds and helped them write their letters home. Unfortunately, her nursing experience nearly cost her her life, as within a month of her arrival in Washington, she caught typhoid fever and had to be sent home.

Some women became outstanding Civil War nurses outside of the official channels controlled by Dorothea Dix. Clara Barton (1821-1912), for example, served as a nurse at the front, caring for the wounded before they ever reached the hospitals. At the outbreak of the war, Barton was living in Washington, D.C., working as a clerk in the government Patent Office, one of the first women to be a regularly appointed civil servant. When a regiment of Massachusetts soldiers, who had been attacked by mobs in Baltimore, arrived in Washington bewildered and homesick, and missing their luggage, Clara Barton befriended them. She sent out a call for supplies to their hometown--Worcester--and arranged to store and distribute the supplies when they arrived. After the Union defeat at Bull Run in July 1861, she was horrified to see that almost no provisions had been made to care for the wounded. Realizing that she could

do more good at the battlefront, because it was there that the soldiers' wounds were most likely to be neglected, she persuaded a reluctant War Department to give her permission to raise supplies independently, and travel freely to the front to distribute them and nurse the wounded.

By August 3, 1862, Clara Barton had cut through all the red tape and was on her way south in a supply wagon pulled by a team of mules:

> When our armies fought on Cedar Mountain [Culpeper], I broke the shackles and went to the field. Five days and nights with three hours' sleep--a narrow escape from capture--and some days of getting the wounded into hospitals at Washington brought Saturday, August 30. And if you chance to feel that the positions I occupied were rough and unseemly for a woman, I can only reply that they were rough and unseemly for men. But under all, lay the life of the nation. I had inherited the rich blessing of health and strength of constitution--such as are seldom given to woman--and I felt that some return was due from me and that I ought to be there.[5]

After Culpepper she served--sometimes alone, sometimes with a team of nurses--at Second Bull Run, Chantilly, Antietam and Fredericksburg, some of the bloodiest battles of the war. She always showed up, miraculously, at the right moment, with badly needed bandages or candles, earning the title "Angel of the battlefield." She made soup and coffee and improvised meals for thousands of men. Her coolness under fire was legendary. In her diary, she described the following scene at Antietam:

> A man lying upon the ground asked for a drink; I stopped to give it, and, having raised him with my right hand, was holding him. Just at this moment a bullet sped its free and easy way between us, tearing a hole in my sleeve and found its way into his body. He fell back dead.[6]

After the battle of Fredericksburg, when the Union soldiers were in retreat, Miss Barton helped tend the wounded, some 1200 men crammed into an old Virginia mansion. Of this vigil she wrote home: "When I rose from the side of the couch where I had knelt for hours...I wrung the blood from the bottom of my clothing before I could step."[7] In the last year of the war she was appointed Superintendent of the Department of Nurses for the Army of the James, which was commanded by General Benjamin Butler. Even in this supervisory role, she nursed the soldiers and took responsibility for the kitchen when the cook took sick. "Some days I have made with my own hands 90 apple pies," she wrote in a letter to friends. At the end of the war Clara Barton set up a center to gather information about missing men, and was responsible for the marking of 13,000 at Andersonville, the notorious Southern prison, with the help of a soldier who had kept a list of the dead. Barton's Civil War work was the beginning of a career dedicated to public service which culminated in her founding the American Red Cross.

Like Clara Barton, Mary Bickerdyke, affectionately known as "Mother Bickerdyke," began her relief work on her own. During a visit to distribute supplies at the army camp in Cairo, Illinois, she took one look at the filthy conditions in which the sick men were living, and without permission, simply stayed to clean up the mess and nurse the sick men. From 1862 on, she worked, usually with two volunteers, Mary Safford and Eliza Porter, laundering, cooking, distributing Sanitary Commission supplies, and nursing in the tent hospitals at the front. Bickerdyke's midnight visit to the battlefield after the battle of Fort Donelson, to search for the wounded among the dead, brought her widespread publicity in Northern newspapers. Impatient, bold, energetic, this "cyclone in petticoats" became one of the most valuable speakers for the Sanitary Commission.

Women in the Military

There were other women at the battlefront besides nurses. There were wives who followed their soldier husbands to war and served as cooks, laundresses and secretaries of the regiment. Approximately 400 women fought in the war disguised as men. One such woman, Sarah Edmonds, joined a company of Michigan volunteers under the name "Frank Thompson." She fought at the first battle of Bull Run and in the first Peninsular campaign of 1862. "Deserting" in the spring of 1863, she served as a nurse for the rest of the war. After the war, Sarah Edmonds published a fictionalized account of her army experiences, portraying herself as a female nurse and spy, not as a male soldier. During the 1880's she was granted a pension of twelve dollars a month.

Mary Walker, a rather eccentric woman, served as a doctor and wore the uniform of a male officer. She spent several months in a Southern prison, after which she was appointed "acting assistant surgeon." In 1865, Dr. Walker received the Congressional Medal of Honor for Meritorious Service, an award that was given out rather freely at the time. Years later, to her great distress, it was withdrawn when a federal board of medal awards made a general review.

Of the women who served the Union as scouts and spies, the most notable was Harriet Tubman, the ex-slave who had rescued hundreds of slaves before the war. Working mainly in South Carolina, she transmitted military information received from blacks behind the Confederate lines.

Controversy still surrounds the Civil War career of Anna Ella Carroll, a Maryland woman, who some years after the war claimed credit for the Tennessee River strategy by which Grant was able to capture Forts Donelson and Henry, the beginning of victory in the West for the Union. She was a skillful writer of political pamphlets, who possibly deserves some credit for helping to keep the border state of Maryland loyal to the Union. She also wrote pamphlets which argued that secession was unconstitutional and that the President had the power to take unusual measures to deal with these "rebellious citizens." Such arguments seem, in retrospect, to justify the course Lincoln followed in dealing with the Confederacy. Although Carroll did visit St. Louis in November 1861, and was in communication with War Department officials on the subject of

a Tennessee River strategy, it is by no means definite that it was her plan that Grant followed in his successful campaign of February 1862. When Carroll placed her claim before Congress along with a request for payment in 1370, she received the support of certain influential men, although Congress took no action on it. During the 1880's, Carroll's claim was taken up by women suffragists, who regarded her as the victim of men unwilling to give women credit for military strategy.

Morale Builders: "Let Us Die to Make Men Free"

We have seen that women played an important role in the national debate on slavery that finally split the Union and led to war. Uncle Tom's Cabin had turned previously indifferent Northerners against slavery and stiffened resistance to the Fugitive Slave Act. The onset of war did not end the concern of many women with the fate of the slaves. The women who had been active in the abolitionist and women's rights movements wanted the war to achieve the emancipation of the slaves--a result that was far from certain when the war began. They wanted to see the war turned into a moral crusade. And the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," the words composed by Julia Ward Howe, set the militantly righteous tone of this crusade:

> Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord:
> He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of
> wrath are stored;
> He hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible
> swift sword:
> His truth is marching on.

Howe came to write the "Battle Hymn" on a visit to Washington, where she was stirred by the sight of marching Union troops singing "John Brown's Body. The words, with their biblical cadences, came to her the next day at dawn, she recalled in her Reminiscences: "I scrawled the verses almost without looking at the paper." Set to the tune of "John Brown's Body," the rousing song--it reportedly brought Lincoln to tears--captured the emotions of the North and helped to unify it.

The leaders of the women's rights movement, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, suspended their conventions and directed their efforts towards the goal of emancipation. In May 1863, they called a meeting to organize the Women's National Loyal League, whose immediate task was to collect one million signatures on a petition asking Congress to pass an amendment freeing the slaves. About five thousand women joined the League and close to 400,000 signatures were collected and presented to the Senate in 1864 by Senator Charles Sumner.

One of the most active lecturers for the League was Josephine Griffing, an abolitionist. Toward the end of the war she helped the freed blacks streaming into Washington find food, shelter and employment. Recognizing the need for a comprehensive government program to meet the needs of these liberated, but destitute people, she lobbied for the creation of a Freedman's Bureau, which was founded in March 1865.

One of the best-known and most popular orators for the Union cause was a young woman named Anna Dickinson, who, while still in her teens, had given lectures on abolition and women's rights. Her passionate speeches won her the title "Joan of Arc" of the Union cause. She was so effective a speaker that Republican candidates asked her to campaign for them during the state elections of 1863 and 1864, even though her views on such issues as emancipation were more extreme than their own.

WOMEN OF THE CONFEDERACY

Women in the South experienced the War between the States firsthand as few Northern women did. They suffered more from hardship and privation and grimly watched while the Yankee invaders destroyed their homes, land and way of life. The women of the Confederacy tended to be intensely loyal to their cause and scornful of men who didn't enlist.

Nurses, Soldiers, Spies

Confederate women volunteered for nursing and relief work, but not on so large a scale as their Northern counterparts. Local soldiers' aid societies sprang up, in which women made bandages and collected supplies, but no organization on the scale of the Sanitary Commission emerged in the South. For one thing, it was unlikely that women raised to be Southern ladies would have undertaken the speech-making, fund-raising and administrative work performed by the Sanitary Commission women. The majority of Southern women were located on farms and plantations, and their first responsibility was to maintain their homes. Nursing and relief work tended to be done mostly by women who lived in the cities.

Although Southern society traditionally frowned upon the very notion of a woman appearing in such a place as an army hospital, many women of "good" family volunteered as nurses, and a number of these became hospital matrons or superintendents. Phoebe Pember of Savannah efficiently managed a Richmond hospital despite the hostility she faced from the chief surgeon. On one occasion she protected the whiskey barrel, which was in her custody, from a group of drunken soldiers, holding them off with a pistol.[8] Kate Cumming of Mobile, Alabama, braved the disapproval of her family to serve in a hospital at the front.

One of the most outstanding Confederate nurses was Sally Louisa Tompkins, a twenty-eight-year-old woman of "good" family, who early in the war opened a hospital in a private home in Richmond and recruited a group of society women to be nurses. Tompkins' dedication was total, and her standards of care and sanitation were extremely high. One contemporary observed after a visit, "The men under Miss Sally's kind care looked so clean and comfortable; cheerful, one might say. They were pleasant and nice to see."[9] Her record of healing was so impressive that in September 1861, when private hospitals were being closed, she was commissioned a captain in the cavalry so that her hospital could continue to receive wounded soldiers. Out of 1,333 patients admitted in the four years of the war, there were only 73 deaths, a remarkable record.

Wives of officers often followed their husbands from one army camp to another, living close to scenes of battle and bombardment. Mary Ann Webster Loughborough, for example, followed her officer husband from Tennessee to Missouri to Mississippi. In her journal, which was published in 1864, she vividly describes keeping house in a cave dug in the side of a hill in Vicksburg, during the siege and bombardment of that town.

Some women with a taste for adventure participated in the military action. Loreta Janeta Velasquez, disguised as a man, fought alongside her husband in the Confederate army, and continued her service as a soldier even after his death. A larger number of women were spies and couriers. Belle Boyd, a daring seventeen-year-old, living in Martinsburg, Virginia, under federal occupation, became friendly with Union officers and passed information by messenger to the Confederates. In the fall of 1861, she was appointed courier for Generals Jackson and Beauregard, a post in which she often rode horseback to relay military information. Arrested and imprisoned several times during the war, she survived it to become an actress as well as a popular speaker on her wartime experiences. Rose Greenhow, a popular Washington hostess from prewar days, when her husband worked for the Department of State, turned her Washington home into a center for a large confederate spy ring. One confederate woman wrote of her in August 1861:

> They say Mrs. Greenhow furnished Beauregard with the latest news of the Federal movements, and so made the Manassas victory a possibility. She sent us the enemy's plans. Everything she said was true, numbers, route and all.[10]

Even after her discovery and imprisonment, Greenhow continued to pass information. In 1863 she was sent abroad to England and France as an unofficial agent for the South. Her death was as dramatic as her life. On her return to America in 1864, she was drowned, when the small boat she had taken to elude capture attempted to escape federal gunboats, and capsized in a storm.

Augusta Evans (Wilson), a writer of sentimental novels, contributed effective propaganda to the Southern cause at a time when morale was low. Her novel Macaria: or Altars of Sacrifice, part of which she had written on wrapping paper while nursing wounded soldiers, was regarded as such a powerful argument for the Confederacy that a Union general allegedly tried to prevent it from getting into the hands of his troops.

Keeping the Home Fires Burning

The majority of Southern women made their greatest contribution to the war effort simply by staying home and running the farm or plantation in the absence of most of the men, except the slaves. They assumed the responsibility for producing food, harvesting and marketing cotton, and making clothing and other supplies for the army. Women got their old handlooms and spinning wheels out of the attic and manufactured homespun cloth. They saved scraps of leather to make into shoes. While the plantation mistress managed the labor of slaves, the farmer's wife undertook the men's work of plowing, planting and heavy farm repair.

Women found work for wages in factories created to produce war supplies, and as schoolteachers replacing men gone to war. Destitute single women, especially war widows, found jobs as government clerks. A Confederate lady wrote in her diary of one such woman:

> Mrs. Bartow, the widow of Colonel Bartow, who was killed at Manassas, is now in one of the departments here. cutting bonds, Confederate bonds, for five hundred Confederate dollars a year...Her brother-in-law, has been urgent with her to come and live with them...In spite of all he can say, she will not forego her resolution, and she will be independent.[11]

Although she admired this woman, the diary writer vowed that she and her friends would rather stay home and starve than stand up all day in an office and be ordered around by a department clerk.

Diaries from Dixie

Many of the Southern women kept diaries and journals and wrote letters recording both the excitement and the ordeal of the war years. Not originally intended for publication, these documents have proved to be a rich mine of information for those seeking to reconstruct daily life in a South that was passing forever. One of the most remarkable of such diaries was that kept by Mary Boykin Chesnut (1823-1886), whose husband, James Chesnut, held important military and legislative posts in the Confederacy. Mary Chesnut was personally acquainted with most of the Confederate leaders as well as with many of the "first families of the South." Published in shortened form as A Diary from Dixie, Chesnut's diary overflows with witty firsthand portraits of the Confederate leaders, military rumors, romances, family tensions and tragedies, vivid descriptions of town and country life, and surprising views of slavery and the slaves.

In her entry of July 9, 1861, just before the Battle of Manassas-Bull Run, Chesnut conveys the gaiety and excitement that prevailed early in the war before either side had any idea how long the conflict would last:

> Our battle summer, so called, May it be our first and our last! After all, we have not had any of the horrors of war. Could there have been a gayer or pleasanter life than we led in Charleston? And Montgomery! How exciting it all was there. So many clever men and women, congregated from every part of the South. To be sure, flies and mosquitoes and a want of neatness and a want of good things to eat did drive us away. In Richmond, the girls say it is perfectly delightful. We find it so too.[12]

When quartered in the cities of Richmond, the Confederate capital, and Columbia, South Carolina, Chesnut and her circle of friends followed a hectic round of social life which included dinner parties and theatricals, a life she greatly preferred to the quiet life on the plantation. In her diary Chesnut reveals

the weaknesses of the Confederacy, the tendency among the leaders to disagree and to resent any show of strength by President Jefferson Davis, and the inability to bury personal differences and pull together that undoubtedly contributed to their defeat. Even after the route of Northern troops at Manassas-Bull Run, there was quarreling and backbiting:

> Trescot says many leaders here hate Jeff Davis. He says disintegration has already begun. Mr. Davis' enemies ask: Why did we not follow the flying foe across the Potomac? That is the question of the hour, even in the drawing room.[13]

Chesnut deplored the tendency of the newspapers to taunt and abuse the government instead of rallying people to its support. "There are the Yankees to abuse," she wrote, "if only our newspapers would let loose their vials of wrath on them and leave us until the fight is over a united people."

When not in Richmond or one of the other Southern cities, Chesnut lived at Mulberry, her father-in-law's plantation. Although not happy there, she vividly evokes the aristocratic way of life that was passing away under her eyes:

> When this establishment at Mulberry breaks up, the very pleasantest, most easy-going life I ever saw will be gone...
>
> My sleeping apartment is large and airy, with windows opening on the lawn east and south. In those deep window seats, idly looking out, I spend much time. A part of the yard which was once a deer park has the appearance of the primeval forest; the forest trees have been unmolested and are now of immense size. In the spring, the air is laden with perfumes, violets, jasmine, crabapple blossoms, roses. Araby the blest never was sweeter in perfume. And yet there hangs here as on every Southern landscape the saddest pall...Carriages are coming up to the door and driving away incessantly.[14]

As the Northern armies swept through the South, cutting a wide path of destruction, Chesnut reports on the fate of the lives and property of friends and acquaintances:

> Poor Mrs. Middleton has paralysis. Has she not had trouble enough? How much she has had to bear, their plantation and home on Edisto destroyed, their house in Charleston burned, her children scattered, starvation in Lincolnton, and all as nothing to the one dreadful blow--her only son was killed in Virginia.[15]

At Mulberry, the Chesnut estate, Sherman's armies had a free-for-all. "On one side of the house, every window was broken, every bell torn down, every piece of furniture destroyed, every door smashed in. The other side was intact." Chesnut explained that Sherman himself stopped his men from destroying the "fine old house" whose owner was over ninety years old. The family books and papers were carried off and strewed along the Charleston Road.

One of the most startling features of A Diary from Dixie is Mary Chesnut's views on slavery, which she claimed were shared by many Southerners and particularly by women. Although intensely loyal to the Confederate cause, she detested slavery, and frequently expressed her hatred for the institution as passionately as any abolitionist. The worst aspect of slavery, in her view, was that it degraded family life for whites and blacks:

> I wonder if it be a sin to think slavery a curse to any land. Men and women are punished when their masters and mistresses are brutes, not when they do wrong. Under slavery, we live surrounded by prostitutes, yet an abandoned woman is sent out of any decent house. Who thinks any worse of a Negro or mulatto woman for being a thing we can't name? God forgive us, but ours is a monstrous system, a wrong and an iniquity! Like the patriarchs of old, our men live all in one house with their wives and their concubines; and the mulattoes one sees in every family partly resemble the white children. Any lady is ready to tell you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody's household but her own. Those, she seems to think, drop from the clouds.[16]

She was angry at what she regarded as the hypocrisy of Northerners like Harriet Beecher Stowe who cried out against slavery from "clean, cool, New England homes" without knowing what it was like to live surrounded by slaves. Despite the devastation wrought by the war, Chesnut, and many like her, rejoiced in the end of slavery as a burden lifted from the back of the South.

The Civil War changed the lives of American women in the North and South more than years of women's rights agitation could have done. Women had shown themselves to be strong, patriotic and competent at almost all kinds of work. They had been planters, farmers, clerks, administrators, public speakers, managers and nurses, and many of them would--because of the deaths of their menfolk--remain employed after the war. Over a million former slave women were added to the labor market as well. Though the ideal of "true womanhood" lived on in popular novels and in the speeches of antisuffrage senators, women were beginning to be a force in American life. Political rights for women were still more than fifty years away, but for the first time, masses of women--not just a handful of heroic individuals--would be seeking greater participation in education, the labor force, the professions, organization work and politics.

NOTES

1. Wilson, *Stranger and Traveler: The Story of Dorothea Dix*, p. 270.
2. Ibid., p. 292.
3. Louisa May Alcott, *Hospital Sketches* (1863; paperback ed., New York, 1957) p. 56.
4. Ibid., p. 58.
5. Marshall W. Fishwick and the Editors of Silver Burdett, *Illustrious Americans: Clara Barton* (Morristown, New Jersey, 1966) p. 153.
6. Ibid., p. 165.
7. James and James, eds., *Notable American Women*, vol. I, p. 104.
8. Scott, *The Southern Lady*, pp. 83-84.
9. Mary Boykin Chesnut, *A Diary from Dixie*, Ben Ames Williams, ed. (1905; paperback ed., Boston, 1949) p. 119.
10. Ibid., p. 121.
11. Ibid., p. 225.
12. Ibid., p. 78.
13. Ibid., pp. 196-197.
14. Ibid., p. 166.
15. Ibid., p. 518.
16. Ibid., pp. 21-22.

Questions for Inquiry and Discussion

1. Those who have studied the history of American women have noted that each of America's wars has contributed in some way to the advancement of women. List the ways in which this was true of American women of both the North and the South during the Civil War.

2. Briefly describe the Civil War careers of Dorothea Dix, Clara Barton, Mother Bickerdyke, Mary Livermore, Louisa May Alcott and Sally Tompkins. What is the most memorable fact about each?

3. What were the important accomplishments of the Sanitary Commission? In what sense did it turn out to be a career training program for thousands of women?

4. Discuss the roles of women such as Julia Ward Howe, Elizabeth Stanton, Anna Dickinson and Josephine Griffing in turning the Union cause into a crusade against slavery.

5. Compare the impact of the Civil War on the lives of Northern and Southern women. In your view, who suffered more from the direct experience of the war? Did anything you read in this chapter contradict the stereotyped view of the delicate Southern "lady"? Explain.

Optional Activity

Investigate the Civil War achievements of Anna Ella Carroll. Was she a military genius, as suffragists claimed? Read the account of her career in History of Woman Suffrage, vol. II, pp. 3-13, the entry on her in Notable American Women, and any other sources you can find. Weigh the evidence for and against her claims as a military strategist. What were her most significant contributions during the Civil War?

CHAPTER TWO

RECONSTRUCTION: WOMEN TEACHERS TO THE FREED SLAVES

Women played an important role in the movement to educate the freed slaves during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Following on the heels of the Union soldiers came the "Yankee schoolmarm," planting the New England schoolhouse on Southern soil. And even though less than half the teachers who came to the South were women, the image of the New England schoolmarm stands out in the history of that period. Most of the teachers were abolitionists who regarded the Civil War primarily as a struggle against slavery, and not just as a war to preserve the Union. They saw in wartime and postwar conditions the opportunity not only to free the slaves, but to prove to the nation that they were capable of functioning as free men and women. The education of the former slaves was thus, in a sense, a continuation of the prewar abolitionist crusade. The teachers were recruited and financed by Northern relief organizations. After the war, the educational effort was supervised by the Freedmen's Bureau.

THE PORT ROYAL EXPERIMENT

The education of the freed slaves and the important role of women in this effort began before the war was over--indeed, even before the Emancipation Proclamation--in areas of the South that fell under Union control. As early as September 1861, a freed slave named Mary Chase opened a school for contrabands (as the slaves behind Union lines were called during the war) in Alexandria, Virginia; and Mary Peake, a free Black, founded a similar school at Fortress Monroe in Hampton, Virginia. However, the most ambitious educational experiment during the war was undertaken at Port Royal, the Sea Islands of South Carolina, captured in November 1861 by Union forces and held under military occupation throughout the war.

As the guns of the Union navy boomed in Port Royal Sound, all the masters fled to the mainland, leaving behind their homes, their cotton plantations and some 10,000 slaves, mostly field hands. In an effort to deal with the urgent needs of the plantation people, who, owing to their isolation on the islands, were among the least educated people in the South, the War Department encouraged relief organizations in the North to send carefully selected volunteers to Port Royal. Early in March 1862, the first band of men and women arrived at Port Royal, and several hundred more were to follow before the war was over. Most of these "missionaries" came from New England, New York and Pennsylvania, and were well educated, idealistic and religious. They distributed food and clothing and provided medical care to the blacks, organized them as free laborers to harvest the valuable cotton crop, and set up a school system.

Although the women who came to Port Royal saw themselves primarily as teachers, they had many other important duties as well. "Besides distributing Northern bounty and teaching school, they also kept house for the superintendents," writes Willie Lee Rose, the author of the major book on the Port Royal

experiment. "These Northern women who stepped into the plantation mistresses' shoes had no easy job. With no conveniences, little furniture or equipment, and army rations sparsely supplemented by plantation produce, the simple production of three meals a day was a large order."[1]

Laura Towne

One of the most outstanding and energetic of the women teachers at Port Royal was Laura Towne (1825-1901), described by a fellow teacher as "the most indispensable person on the place." A native of Pennsylvania, Towne came to Port Royal in 1862, under the auspices of the Port Royal Relief Committee of Philadelphia. It was an opportunity for her to combine her ardent abolitionist beliefs with an interest in medicine. Like most of the female volunteers, she performed housekeeping chores and distributed clothing. She also practiced medicine, but her greatest contribution was to education. In September 1862, she founded the Penn School, one of the very first of the freed slaves' schools, and one of the longest lived. As with most of these schools, the original Penn School was held in a church. However, by 1864, Towne was able to move into a prefabricated schoolhouse supplied to her by Northern supporters and in which she even had installed a New England-style school bell.

Laura Towne offered her students academic subjects on a primary and secondary level: reading and writing, arithmetic, geography, and eventually, even Greek and Latin. Unlike most of the other teachers, who returned to the North after the Civil War or Reconstruction, she stayed on the Sea Islands for the rest of her life. For many years, her school offered the only secondary school education available to the black people of the area, and it served as a training ground for black teachers. Although she stopped practicing medicine, she did perform the duties of a public health officer, and also served unofficially as a legal advisor to the Sea Island blacks, in many cases helping them to purchase the very land on which they had formerly worked as slaves.

Charlotte Forten

Most of the teachers of the freed slaves were white. One of the few free black teachers from the North was Charlotte Forten (1837-1914), known later as Charlotte Forten Grimke as a result of her marriage to Reverend Francis Grimke.[2] Her journal, published after her death, is one of the most important firsthand accounts of the Port Royal experiment, as well as a moving record of a sensitive young black woman's experience of racial prejudice in the 19th century. Forten came from an unusually privileged background for a black woman of her time. Her family was among the wealthiest and most influential black families of Philadelphia. Her grandfather, James Forten, a successful sailmaker, was an outspoken antislavery leader, who opposed the Colonization Society (those who wanted to free the slaves and send them back to Africa), and helped convert William Lloyd Garrison and others to radical abolitionism. He also raised funds in the black community to support Garrison's paper The Liberator. Charlotte Forten's father, Robert Forten, and her uncle, Robert Purvis, were both leading black abolitionists, so that from early childhood on, she lived and breathed radical abolitionist doctrines. Since her father refused to send her to the segregated schools of Philadelphia, Forten was educated at home by private tutors.

Charlotte Forten began her Journal at age sixteen, after she had gone to live in Salem, Massachusetts, where she could complete her education at unsegregated schools. After graduating from grammar school in 1856, she became a teacher, the first black to teach white pupils in Salem. Though Forten was happy enough to have the teaching job, her main interests were reading novels and poetry, going to lectures and concerts, and above all attending abolitionist gatherings. Because of her family connections, she was personally acquainted with the leading abolitionists, including Garrison, the poet John Greenleaf Whittier, Maria Weston Chapman and others whom she admired. Deeply hurt by racial prejudice, Charlotte Forten was filled with a desire to prove that blacks, if given opportunities, could equal whites in intellectual ability.

The Civil War changed Charlotte Forten's rather quiet, sheltered life, filling it with excitement and purpose. Hoping to use her own intellectual abilities to serve her people, she volunteered eagerly to be a teacher at Port Royal. Arriving on St. Helena's Island, she began teaching almost immediately in Laura Towne's school. Though Forten approached her work in an idealistic spirit, the difference between her high hopes and the difficult realities often caused her to express disappointment or depression. Here, for example, is what she reported to her Journal--her "friend beloved"--on her first day of teaching:

> Wednesday, Nov. 5 [1862] Had my first teaching experience, and to you and you only friend beloved, will I acknowledge that it was not a very pleasant one. Part of my scholars are very tiny,--babies, I call them--and it is hard to keep them quiet and interested while I am hearing the larger ones. They are too young even for the alphabet, it seems to me. I think I must write home to ask somebody to send me picture-books and toys to amuse them with. I fancied Miss T[owne] looked annoyed when, at one time the little ones were unusually restless. Perhaps it was only my fancy...Well I must not be discouraged. Perhaps things will go on better to-morrow.[3]

Forten and the other teachers never stopped reminding the children that they were free, and that they should honor those who fought for their freedom:

> Monday, Nov. 10 [1862] ...We taught--or rather commenced teaching the children "John Brown," which they entered into eagerly. I felt to the full significance of that song being sung here in South Carolina by little negro children, by those whom he--the glorious old man--died to save. Miss T[owne] told them about him.[4]

They also tried to instill racial pride by teaching about heroic men of color:

> Thursday, Nov. 13 [1862] ...Talked to the children a little while today about the noble Toussaint L'Ouverture. They listened very attentively. It is well that they sh'ld know what one of their own color c'ld do for his race. I long to inspire them with courage and ambition (of a noble sort,) and high purpose.[5]

The teachers marveled at the burning eagerness of the former slaves, adults, and children, to learn to read and write. Forten noted the quickness with which many of them mastered the basic skills:

> Thursday, Nov. 13 [1862] ...This eve. Harry, one of the men on the place, came in for a lesson. He is most eager to learn, and is really a scholar to be proud of. He learns rapidly. I gave him his first lesson in writing to-night, and his progress was wonderful. He held the pen almost perfectly right the first time. He will very soon learn to write, I think.
>
> Tuesday, Nov. 18 [1862] ...To-night gave Cupid a lesson in the alphabet. He is not a brilliant scholar, but he tries hard to learn, and so I am sure will succeed in time. A man from another plantation came in for a lesson...He knows his letters, and seems very bright.[6]

In the words of Booker T. Washington, famous ex-slave and black spokesman, "it was a whole race trying to go to school."

Port Royal was also the scene of the recruitment of the first regiment of ex-slaves in the Union army, the First South Carolina Volunteers and the training of the first regiment of free blacks, the 54th Massachusetts Volunteers, both regiments under white officers. Charlotte Forten rejoiced at the sight of the black soldiers in their blue coats and scarlet pants, and triumphantly reported to her Journal every instance of their bravery in battle. After the disastrous Union attack on the forts outside Charleston, in which the Massachusetts 54th was almost wiped out, and their commanding officer Colonel Robert Shaw killed, she devoted herself to nursing the wounded soldiers.

In her Journal as well as in articles published in The Atlantic Monthly, Charlotte Forten vividly described such memorable Port Royal scenes as the celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation, on which occasion the black people, assembled for the celebration, spontaneously burst into the singing of "My Country 'Tis of Thee," a "touching and beautiful incident." She also described a meeting with the legendary Harriet Tubman. And she frequently mentioned the rousing religious gatherings of the plantation blacks at which they sang their unique, rhythmic music, which sounded exciting but unsettling to Northern ears.

Susie King Taylor

Another black teacher of freed slaves on the Sea Islands was Susie King Taylor (1848-1912). Born a slave on the Georgia Sea Islands, she was raised by a grandmother in Savannah, where she learned to read and write at an illegal school for blacks. She escaped to freedom when the Union forces captured the Sea Islands, and not long after, married Edward King, a freed slave belonging to the First South Carolina Volunteers in training at Port Royal. She became the regimental laundress and nurse and taught many of the soldiers to read and write. As she later described it in her life story, Reminiscences of My Life in Camp (1902):

> I taught a great many of the comrades in Company E to read and write, when they were off duty. Nearly all were anxious to learn. My husband taught some also when it was convenient for him. I was very happy to know my efforts were successful in camp, and also felt grateful for the appreciation of my services. I gave my services willingly for four years and three months without receiving a dollar. I was glad, however, to be allowed to go with the regiment, to care for the sick and afflicted comrades.[7]

After her husband's death in 1866, Susie King Taylor supported herself and her son by teaching in a school for freed slaves in Georgia.

Postwar: Founding Schools

At the war's end there were some four million former slaves, most of them desperately eager for an education for themselves and their children. Schools for the freed slaves were launched all over the South. In the Port Royal pattern, the teachers were recruited mainly in the North by relief and missionary organizations, but now the activities of these organizations were coordinated by the Freedmen's Bureau, which had been established by Congress in March 1865. By 1869 there were more than 9,000 teachers, of whom about 45 percent were women, teaching some quarter of a million children enrolled in over 4,300 schools.[8] According to some historians, these schools laid the groundwork for a public school system in the South where none had existed before the war. As Congressional Reconstruction got underway, the reconstructed governments of the Southern states generally voted tax funds to support the schools. (In most states there were separate schools for black children and white children, but in some states the schools were mixed.)

Unlike the Northern teachers at Port Royal during the war, those who came to teach the freed slaves after the war were obliged to face the hostility of the white Southerners, now embittered in defeat and living in poverty, their old way of life destroyed. Since most of the teachers believed in social and political equality for the former slaves, their ideas were bitterly resented even by those Southerners who favored some sort of education for the blacks. The teachers seemed to be consciously carrying out the aims of the Radical Republicans in Congress, and as a result, were at best ignored and socially excluded, at worst harassed and sometimes physically attacked. Certainly many of the teachers did share the views of the Radical Republicans, and tried to teach their pupils to look to their Northern allies for guidance. The political zeal of many of the teachers is evident in the following set of questions and answers frequently heard in the freed slaves' schools:

Teacher: Are you glad you are free?
Student: Yes, Indeed.
Who gave you your freedom?
God.
Through whom?
Abraham Lincoln.
Is Mr. Lincoln dead?
Yes.
Who is your president?
Johnson.
Are you glad you have schools and teachers?
Yes.
Do you want these friends who are here today to go North and send you more teachers?
Yes, Indeed.[9]

A typical day in a freed slaves' school might begin with a prayer, a portion of scripture and the singing of hymns and such songs as the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and "John Brown's Body." Many of the teachers tried to teach the classical curriculum of the typical New England school. It included reading and spelling, geography and oral and written arithmetic. In the higher grades history, philosophy and natural philosophy were taught, and sometimes Greek and Latin. Other teachers favored the teaching of practical skills: knitting, sewing and housekeeping for the women; carpentry and blacksmithing for the men. In addition to teaching academic and vocational subjects, many of the teachers tried to instill in their students the New England virtues of cleanliness, thrift and pride in craftsmanship. "We were convinced," wrote one woman teacher, "...that needles and thread and soap and decent clothing were the best educators, and would civilize them sooner than book knowledge."[10]

That one such teacher made a profound impression on a future black leader we know from Up from Slavery, the autobiography of Booker T. Washington. Arriving at his heart's desire, Hampton Institute, after an incredibly arduous journey, Washington presented himself to the head teacher, fearing that he looked like a tramp. Without either refusing or admitting him, the teacher handed him a broom and asked him to sweep the recitation room.

> I swept the recitation-room three times. Then I got a dusting-cloth and I dusted it four times. All the woodwork around the walls, every bench, table and desk, I went over four times with my dusting-cloth. Besides, every piece of furniture had been moved and every closet and corner in the room had been thoroughly cleaned. I had the feeling that in a large measure my future depended upon the impression I made upon the teacher in the cleaning of that room. When I was through, I reported to the head teacher. She was a "Yankee" woman who knew just where to look for dirt. She went into the room and inspected the floor and closets; then she took her handkerchief and rubbed it on the woodwork about the walls, and over the table and benches. When she was unable to find one bit of dirt on the floor, or particle of dust on any of the furniture, she quietly remarked, "I guess you will do to enter this institution."[11]

Elsewhere in his book, Washington credits this teacher, Mary Mackie, with having taught him pride in the dignity of labor, the cornerstone of his educational philosophy.

Another dedicated "Yankee" teacher who favored the kind of vocational training for Blacks later advocated by Booker T. Washington and others was Martha Schofield (1839-1916). During the Civil War she served as a nurse, and afterward volunteered to teach at a freed slaves' school in South Carolina. She started teaching the Sea Islands, near Laura Towne, but later moved to a Freedmen's Bureau school in Aiken, South Carolina, where she stayed for the rest of her life. When funding from the Bureau ran out, Martha Schofield raised money for the school from Northern philanthropists. Offering courses in farming, carpentry, blacksmithing, cooking, sewing and printing in addition to academic subjects, the Schofield school eventually became one of the most highly regarded high schools in the South. Like Miss Mackie, Martha Schofield laid great stress on cleanliness, hygiene and attractive and tidy living conditions.

Before long the Northern teachers to the freed slaves were joined by numbers of Southern white women, who found in schoolteaching a respectable means of support. By the 1870's, more and more of the newly literate black people were becoming teachers themselves, many of them only a step ahead of their students in age and ability. With Reconstruction at an end, and white supremacy restored in state after state after 1876, the public school system established during Reconstruction remained, but became totally segregated. Far less tax money was spent on black schools than on white schools, and black children, in many places, received only a minimal education. In order for black people to obtain any kind of quality education, they had to found their own institutions with the help of private benefactors.

Fortunately, by the 1870's, a corps of black college graduates were ready to assume leadership in the education of their people. The institutions for higher learning which had been founded during Reconstruction, such as Hampton Institute, Howard University, Atlanta University and others, were turning out graduates who would become teachers and school founders all over the South.

One such educational leader was Lucy Laney (1854-1933). Born in Macon, Georgia, of parents who had been slaves, she was educated at a school for freed slaves founded by the American Missionary Association, where she proved to be an excellent student. At the age of fifteen, she was one of the students selected to be in the first class of Atlanta University. After graduating in 1873, she taught at various public schools throughout Georgia. In 1886, Lucy Laney founded the Haines Normal and Industrial Institute in Augusta, Georgia. She raised the money for the enterprise in the North, naming the school after a major benefactor, Mrs. F.E.H. Haines. Lucy Laney aimed to prepare her students for college to become teachers. She disagreed with those educators--black and white--who regarded vocational training as the most appropriate course of study for black people, and she offered her students a full liberal arts course.

During the 1890's, she added a kindergarten and a nurses' training program. She was not afraid to speak out publicly against racial discrimination and injustice, and she worked on a municipal committee to obtain greater financial support from the city of Augusta for Blacks' education. In 1893 Lucy Laney wrote proudly of some of the accomplishments of her school:

> ...Already in the public schools of this city, in sight of our building, four of our girls are employed as teachers. County School Commissioners send to us for teachers. We are through our students yearly reaching a large number of persons. Through our forty student teachers, with schools now under their care that average 35 scholars each, we are reaching indirectly 1400 children. The three or four hundred added to this that come directly under our care causes us to reach about 1800 young people; but, oh, large as this number seems, it is small when we think of the many hundreds to whom scarcely a ray of light has yet come![12]

Though Lucy Laney accepted both boys and girls at her school, she was particularly concerned with the education of girls. She regarded women as the force that would morally uplift the black race:

> The educated Negro woman, the woman of character and culture, is needed in the schoolroom not only in the kindergarten, and in the primary and the secondary school; but she is needed in high school, the academy, and the college. Only those of character and culture can do successful lifting, for she who would mould character must herself possess it. Not alone in the schoolroom can the intelligent woman lend a lifting hand, but as a public lecturer she may give advice, helpful suggestions, and important knowledge that will change a whole community and start its people on the upward way.[13]

NOTES

1. Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (paperback ed., New York, 1964) p. 85.

2. Reverend Francis Grimke was the son of a slave mother by Henry Grimke, a South Carolina planter, the brother of the famous abolitionists Sarah and Angelina Grimke.

3. Forten, *The Journal of Charlotte Forten,* Ray Billington, ed., p. 148.

4. Ibid., p. 148.

5. Ibid., pp. 149-150.

6. Ibid., pp. 150, 152.

7. Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, p. 100. Excerpt is from Susie King Taylor, *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp* (Boston, 1902).

8. Ibid., pp. 93-94.

9. Henry Lee Swint, *The Northern Teacher in the South: 1826-1870* (Nashville, Tennessee, 1941) p. 89.

10. Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, p. 235. Quotation is from Elizabeth Hyde Botume, *First Days Amongst the Contrabands* (Boston, 1893).

11. Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (1901; paperback ed., New York, 1965) p. 47.

12. Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, p. 123. Excerpt is from Lucy Laney, *Church at Home and Abroad* (August 1893), p. 140.

13. Loewenberg and Bogin, eds., *Black Women in Nineteenty-Century American Life*, p. 300. Excerpt is from Lucy Laney, "The Burden of the Educated Colored Woman," a paper read at the Hampton Negro Conference No. III, July 1899.

Questions for Inquiry and Discussion

1. From what you know of their reform activities before the Civil War, why was it natural for Northern women to play an active role in the education of freed slaves?

2. Briefly describe the contribution of each of the following women to the education of freed slaves: Laura Towne, Charlotte Forten, Susie King Taylor, Martha Schofield and Lucy Laney.

3. What were the two types of education offered the freed slaves by the Northern schoolteachers? Which type evidently influenced Booker T. Washington? Which influenced Lucy Laney?

4. Why were many of the Northern teachers resented by white Southerners? Give at least one example of the "political" teachings communicated to the former slaves by Northern teachers.

Optional Activity

Read firsthand accounts of teachers of the freed slaves at Port Royal, South Carolina, such as The Journal of Charlotte Forten or Letters from Port Royal (edited by Elizabeth Ware Pearson; see Bibliography) or others. Prepare an oral or written report presenting some of the highlights of the teachers' experiences.

CHAPTER THREE

WOMEN OF THE WESTERN FRONTIER

The end of the Civil War saw a new surge of expansion westward on the part of a triumphant, powerful and growing Union. The years 1865-1890 were the classic period of the American frontier; the best known in story and legend for its cowboys and homesteaders and horseback-riding Indians of the Great Plains. But actually America's westward orientation had begun in the era before the war--the era of Manifest Destiny, of the Mexican War and of the California gold rush. In fact, the nation had really begun to look at the vast frontier stretching away from the seacost on which it was born, back at the time of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803.

SOME INDIAN WOMEN OF THE WEST

Sacajawea: Shoshone Woman

If the story of America's westward expansion begins with the Louisiana Purchase, then the role of women in that story properly begins with the part played by Sacajawea in the Lewis and Clark expedition. Even before the purchase, President Thomas Jefferson had ordered Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to explore the Northwest Territory with the hope of finding a water route to the Pacific, and to become acquainted with the Indians there. The members of the expedition left St. Louis in May 1804, and ended their journey in September 1806. The one woman in the expedition, Sacajawea (c.1786-1812), a Shoshone ("of Snake") Indian, was of great value to it as an interpreter and guide in the wilderness. She was one of the wives of Toussaint Charbonneau, a French Canadian hired by the party as an interpreter. The couple joined the expedition early in 1805, while its members were wintering among the Mandan Indians along the Missouri River in what is now North Dakota. Sacajawea gave birth to a son, her first child, shortly before the party set off, and undoubtedly the presence of the eighteen-year-old mother and her infant gave a peaceful appearance to the exploring party.

Although Sacajawea was not the principal guide for Lewis and Clark, as many of the legends about her have claimed, she did perform many valuable services. Lewis noted her ability to find wilderness foods such as wild artichokes to supplement their diet of meat and fish. Once, when one of the boats containing instruments, books, medicines and other articles vital to the success of the enterprise overturned, the boat was righted and the contents saved, owing to the cool heads and courage of some of the members on board, including Sacajawea, but not her excitable husband. Lewis observed, "The Indian woman to whom I ascribe equal fortitude and resolution with any person on board at the time of the accident, caught and preserved most of the light articles which were washed overboard."[1]

Lewis and Clark had most reason to be grateful to Sacajawea when they finally encountered the Lemhi Shoshone Indians, the tribe from which she had been captured and sold away years before. At one point when she was ill, Lewis observed worriedly that she was "our only dependence for a friendly negotiation with the Snake Indians." They needed the Shoshone to give them horses and help guide them through the Continental Divide and then to the navigable waters of the Columbia River. But the Lemhi Shoshone were at first suspicious of the party. It seems clear from the journals of Lewis and Clark that Sacajawea's presence was important in winning the confidence of this tribe. As described there, Lewis and Clark opened a conference with the chief, Cameahwait, and sent for Sacajawea to interpret:

> She came into the tent, sat down, and was beginning to interpret when in the person of Cameahwait she recognized her brother: She instantly jumped up, and ran and embraced him, throwing over him her blanket and weeping profusely:...After some conversation between them she resumed her seat, and attempted to interpret for us, but her new situation seemed to overpower her, and she was frequently interrupted by her tears.[2]

On the return trip in the summer of 1806, when the group was divided into two parties, Sacajawea served as a guide to Clark's party as they made their way through the mountain passes around the Continental Divide. When Lewis and Clark parted from Sacajawea and Charbonneau in August 1806, Lewis remarked:

> This man has been very serviceable to us, and his wife particularly useful among the Shoshonees. Indeed, she has borne with a patience truly admirable, the fatigues of so long a route, incumbered with the charge of an infant, who is even now only nineteen months old.[3]

Charbonneau was paid five hundred dollars and thirty-three cents, Sacajawea, nothing. Clark eventually undertook the education of Sacajawea's son, whom he found a "beautiful promising child."

Another Native American woman around whom legends grew in the history of the Northwest was Marie Dorion, an Iowa Indian, who was the only woman on the overland expedition to Astoria, at the mouth of the Columbia River, made by John Jacob Astor's fur company. She is known mainly for her outstanding feats of survival in the wilderness. Her story was well known in her lifetime through Washington Irving's Astoria, and through other accounts by Astoria pioneers.

In the early 19th century Native American women of the West like Sacajawea, Marie Dorion and many others played an important role in introducing the American explorers and traders to the geographical marvels of their land and to the ways of their people. The earliest frontiersmen turned to Indian women for companionship as well as security. Many of the most well-known western scouts and mountain men were "squaw men." However, once full-scale emigration to the West got underway, and white women began arriving in increasing numbers, the unions of Indian women and white men became socially unacceptable.

Susette La Flesche: Crusader for the Omaha

Once Americans came with their families to settle and farm, rather than to explore and trap furs, they inevitably clashed with the Indians, who resented and in the end violently--but unsuccessfully--resisted the takeover of their ancestral lands. As the white settlers spread first throughout the Far West and then filled up the Great Plains, the Indians were increasingly herded onto reservations. And even there, the lands allotted to them were constantly in danger of being reduced. While for some Indian leaders war against the white man was the only honorable solution, others saw this as a suicidal course and came to adopt the view that their only hope for survival lay in learning the white man's ways and educating themselves and their children so that they would be able to deal with the laws of the United States. Such a leader was Joseph La Flesche, or Iron Eye, the chief of the Omaha Indians of Nebraska at the time when treaties with the United States government were shrinking their hunting grounds to a small reservation on the Missouri River. His daughter Susette La Flesche (1854-1903) was to become an effective mediator between her own people and American society.

Susette La Flesche, or Bright Eyes, received her early education at a mission school on the reservation, and was so eager to continue her education that a sympathetic teacher helped her to attend a girls' seminary in New Jersey. In 1873, at the age of 19, she returned to the reservation where she became a teacher. In 1877 occurred the episode that impelled her to become a crusader for Indian rights, and which began to arouse the American public to an awareness of the dishonorable way that the government had dealt with the Indians. The government had mistakenly assigned the lands of the Ponca, a neighboring tribe of the Omaha, to the more warlike Sioux, and forcibly removed the Poncas to the Indian territory--Oklahoma--where many of them died of illness and starvation. Susette La Flesche began to write accounts of the plight of the Poncas and sent them to an Omaha newspaper. In 1879 the Ponca chief, Standing Bear, and some of his followers, walked the five hundred miles from the Indian territory back to their land, where they were arrested by military authorities.

Thomas H. Tibbles, the Omaha newspaperman to whom La Flesche had been sending her articles, decided that the situation could be publicized and the injustice suffered by the Poncas brought to the attention of reformers in the East. He accordingly arranged a lecture tour of the East for La Flesche, her brother Francis and Chief Standing Bear. Dressed in Indian costume, using her Indian name, Bright Eyes, she impressed her enthusiastic audiences as a true Indian princess, and her eloquent speaking aroused a number of reformers to champion Indian rights. Two women in particular were inspired by La Flesche to make the cause of the Indians their life's work: Helen Hunt Jackson, a poet, whose book Century of Dishonor (1881) summarized the long series of broken treaties between the U.S. government and the Indians, and whose novel Ramona (1884) was an attempt to do for the Indians what Uncle Tom's Cabin had done for the slaves; and Alice Fletcher who became an ethnologist, studying the ways of the Omaha and other tribes, and who eventually served as an Indian agent among the Nez Perces in Idaho.

Susette La Flesche also influenced Senator Henry L. Dawes to take up the Indian cause in Congress and the result was the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887, which authorized the allotment of reservation land with citizenship rights to individual Indians. (Although at the time the Dawes Act seemed to promise greater justice for the Indians, it was eventually criticized as a law which hastened the breakdown of tribal structure and further reduced Indian land-holdings.)

Susette La Flesche was not the only remarkable woman in her family. Her younger sister Susan La Flesche Picotte was also educated in the East and received a medical degree in 1889 when she was twenty-three. She returned to live among the Omaha in Nebraska and served her people as a doctor, hospital founder and community leader. The La Flesche sisters, by ancestry and upbringing, lived on the border of two worlds--white and Indian. While they both absorbed the values of the former, they devoted themselves to the needs of the latter.

PIONEER MISSIONARIES IN OREGON: NARCISSA WHITMAN AND OTHERS

Narcissa Whitman (1808-1847) and Eliza Spalding (1807-1851), the first two white women to make the overland journey through the Rockies to the Pacific Northwest, wanted to bring Christianity to the Indians of that region. Whitman, a deeply religious young woman who had grown up in western New York, had wanted to be a Protestant missionary from the time she was a teenager. Her marriage to Dr. Marcus Whitman, the organizer of the Oregon missionary expedition, gave her the opportunity to fulfill her youthful dream. At their wedding ceremony in February 1836, which was also a farewell service, she moved the assembled guests to tears when her clear soprano voice sang out in solo the last stanza of a missionary hymn:

> In the deserts let me labor,
> On the mountains let me tell,
> How he died--the blessed Savior--
> To redeem a world from hell!
> Let me hasten, let me hasten,
> Far in heathen lands to dwell.[4]

The day after the wedding, the Whitmans set out on the seven-month journey to Oregon. The overland part of the trip began at Liberty, Missouri, the members of the party traveling the 1900 miles by horseback and wagon. The two women, Whitman and Spalding--the wife of another missionary, Henry Spalding--traveled most of the way on horseback riding sidesaddle, with the left foot in the stirrup and the right leg hooked over a horn on the saddle. This cramped position--we can only guess at the discomfort--was the only riding position considered suitable for women in the early 19th century. And despite the rugged conditions, the two women wore the close-fitting heavy-skirted costume typical of the 19th century lady.

Whatever the discomfort, Narcissa Whitman thoroughly enjoyed her unique wedding journey and enthusiastically recorded her impressions in letters to her parents and in a diary:

> Our manner of living is far preferable to any in the States. I never was so contented and happy before. Neither have I enjoyed such health for years. In the morn as soon as the day breaks, the first that we hear is the word--arise, arise. Then the mules set up such noise as you never heard which puts the whole camp in motion. We encamp in a large ring--baggage and men, tents and wagons, and all the animals, except the cows...within the circle. This arrangement is to accommodate the guard who stands regularly every night and day, also when we are in motion, to protect our animals from the approach of Indians who would steal them.[5]

She seemed to delight in the details of open-air cooking and eating on the prairies:

> Our table is the ground, our tablecloth is an India rubber cloth, used when it rains as a cloak; our dishes are made of tin-basins for tea cups, iron spoons and plates,... and several pans for milk and to put our meat in...--each one carries his own knife in a scabbard and it is already ready for use.[6]

When their supply of bread gave out, the two women baked bread for the company of ten over the open fire. As they had taken cows with them, they enjoyed the luxury of milk. When they reached the buffalo range, that animal, cooked in a variety of ways, became their major source of nourishment. It disagreed with Spalding, who was in poor health, but Whitman thrived on it. "So long as I have buffalo meat," she wrote home, "I do not wish anything else." Like many of the pioneer women who were to follow her, Narcissa Whitman quickly became accustomed to using buffalo chips (dung) for fuel on the wood-scarce prairie.

After a month and a half of traveling on the prairie, the women had their first chance to launder their clothing during an eight-day stop at Fort Laramie. Then quietly, on July 4, 1836, came the historic moment when Narcissa Whitman and Eliza Spalding rode through South Pass (now in Wyoming) on the Continental Divide. "Crossed a ridge of land today; called the divide, which separates the waters that flow into the Atlantic from those that flow into the Pacific, and camped for the night on the head waters of the Colorado," remarked Eliza Spalding in her diary, without excitement.[7]

It did not take long, however, for the women's achievement in crossing the Rockies to be appreciated. Two days later, the missionary party reached the fur traders' Rendezvous on the Green River, where they were met by a large welcoming party of fur trappers, mountain men and Indians. The two white women were immediately the center of attention, objects of awe and admiration. Whitman wrote: "I was met by a company of native women, one after the other, shaking hands and saluting me with a most hearty kiss. They gave Sister Spalding the same salutation." One of the mountain men present at the Rendezvous described, many years later, the strong impression made on both the trappers and the Indians by the two missionary women:

> Mrs. Whitman was a large, stately, fair skinned woman, with blue eyes and light auburn, almost golden hair. Her manners were at once dignified and gracious. She was, both by nature and education, a lady, and had a lady's appreciation of all that was courageous and refined; yet not without an element of romance and heroism in her disposition strong enough to have impelled her to undertake a missionary life in the wilderness. Mrs. Spalding, the other lady, was more delicate than her companion, yet equally earnest and zealous in the cause they had undertaken. The Indians...seemed to regard them both as beings of a superior nature.[8]

The missionary party traveled from the Green River Rendezvous to their destination--Fort Walla Walla on the Columbia River--in the company of men from the Hudson's Bay Company as well as the Nez Perce and Cayuse Indians. The long stretch along the Snake River between the Rockies and the Blue Mountains was the most strenuous part of the journey. It was so steep, rocky and sandy, that Marcus Whitman finally had to abandon their wagon at Fort Boise. Even the exuberant Narcissa Whitman now complained of the tediousness of the journey and wrote of missing her mother's bread and butter. At one point Eliza Spalding was thrown from her horse and dragged some distance with her foot in the stirrup when her horse stepped into a hornets' nest. As they neared their final destination, however, Whitman was stirred by the beauty of the mountain scenery:

> It was beautiful. Just as we gained the highest elevation & began to descend, the sun was dipping his disk behind the western horizon. Beyond the valley, we could see two distinct mountains, Mount Hood & Mount St. Helens. These lofty peaks were of a conical form & separate from each other by a considerable distance. Behind the former the sun was hiding part of his rays which gave us a more distinct view of this gigantic cone. The beauty of this extensive valley contrasted well with the rolling mountains behind us & at this hour of twilight was enchanting & quite diverted my mind from the fatigue under which I was labouring.[9]

Three days later, on September 1, 1836, she wrote with excitement:

> You can better imagine our feelings this morning than I can describe them. I could not realize that the end of our long journey was so near. We arose as soon as it was light, took a cup of coffee and eat of the duck we had given us last night, then dressed for Walla Walla. We started while it was yet early, for all were in haste to reach the desired haven. The first appearance of civilization we saw was the garden, two miles this side of the fort.[10]

The Whitmans established their Protestant mission among the Cayuse Indians at Waiilatpu, while the Spaldings established theirs 125 miles away among the Nez Perces. Thus, at the very beginning of their missionary work, each of the

women was alone and did not see the other for about a year. While Marcus Whitman built the mission house, practiced medicine and taught the Indians the fundamentals of farming, Narcissa Whitman taught in the mission school and supervised the complex household economy, a great burden, as everything had to be done from scratch, and all the cooking performed over the open fireplace. In 1838 four other missionary couples came to Oregon as reinforcements so that there were now six women among whom to share the problems of being wives and mothers in the wilderness. An indication of the strong need for sisterhood among the women was the founding, in September 1838, by the six wives of the Columbia Material Association, a kind of mothers' club, whose members pledged to help each other perform a Christian mother's duties.

The Whitmans led the way for countless American settlers, but their mission work ultimately failed and their great adventure ended in tragedy. For one thing, the barriers of language and culture between themselves and the Cayuse Indians were great and the latter were not attracted by their religion. Idealistic as she was, Whitman was perhaps too much the sensitive refined lady, and she grew to resent the constant presence of the Indians in her house. "The greatest trial is to a woman's feelings," she wrote to her mother in 1840, "is to have her cooking and eating room always filled with four or five or more Indians--men--especially at meal time." A terrible blow to the couple was the accidental drowning in 1839 of their beloved little daughter Alice Clarissa, born shortly after the founding of the mission.

The Indians began to show increasing hostility toward the missionaries in the 1840's as the number of white emigrants to Oregon steadily grew. Whitman wrote to her mother:

> We are emphatically situated on the highway between the states and the Columbia River, and are a resting place for the weary travelers, consequently a greater burden rests upon us than any of our associates--to be always ready. And doubtless many of those who are coming to this mission their resting place will be with us until they seek and find homes of their own among the solitary wilds of Oregon.[11]

The Indians resented, among other things, the aid and medical attention given the incoming emigrants by the Whitmans. In 1847, their resentment came to a head when the settlers brought with them an epidemic of measles which afflicted both white and Indian children. When Marcus Whitman was able to cure the white children, but not the Indians, who, lacking immunities, died, the superstitious Cayuses regarded Whitman's medical work as witchcraft. On November 29, 1847, a small band of Cayuse warriors invaded the mission, murdered both Marcus and Narcissa and fourteen others, and took prisoners. The massacre soon provoked an outcry which probably hastened the claiming of the Oregon territory for the United States.

Two of the other women in the Oregon missions--Eliza Spalding and Mary Walker--while less glamorous than Narcissa Whitman, were perhaps better suited in personality to be pioneer wives. Spalding was the first of the missionaries

to learn the language of the Indians--the Nez Perces--and they had a high regard for her. She was also successful in teaching the Indian women at their mission to sew, spin and weave. Mary Walker, the wife of the missionary Elkanah Walker, one of the women to arrive in the second group, was a woman of incredible stamina. Her diary is an important record of the daily life at an Oregon mission. On a typical day Walker would record in her diary: "Dipped 24 dozen candles. Milked. Made cheese. Washed. Cooking, scolding, etc., as usual...Have been 4 days occupied in finishing the windows. Our house is wholly glassed tho to complete it I had to set 47 squares of glass that were more or less injured." In addition, Mary Walker made all the family clothing and shoes, manufactured soap, and bore six children in nine years. She also found the time to satisfy her keen interest in nature by collecting rocks and plants and stuffing animals. She embodied the skill, strength and intelligence needed by the pioneer woman to survive and triumph.[12]

WOMEN ON THE WESTERN TRAIL

Many women were to follow Narcissa Whitman and Eliza Spalding on what the former twice called "an unheard of journey for females." A peak year for emigration to Oregon was 1843, when a wagon train of two hundred families made the overland crossing. Emigration to California also began in the early 1840's, increased in 1846-47, the year of the famous and disastrous Donner party, and rose to a flood after the discovery of gold in 1848. Eventually discoveries of gold and silver in other parts of the West attracted new settlement. Finally came the settlement of the Great Plains after the Civil War by homesteaders.

Men outnumbered women in the emigrations and in the new settlements. Although no one has exact figures, it has been estimated that during the gold rush years, 1849-50, approximately 30,000 people a year migrated to the Far West--25,500 men, 3,000 women and 1,500 children.[13] The scarcity of women made them valued as workers and as wives, and most women who went west had very little trouble finding a husband if they wanted one. Certain enterprising persons made it their mission to recruit females for the West. As early as 1845, Catharine Beecher, the well-known educator, wrote The Duty of American Women to Their Country, in which she argued that young women should be sent to the newly settled regions of the West as schoolteachers. During the 1860's, a young man named Asa Mercer, from the Washington Territory, recruited young women from the East to go to Seattle by ship. The larger of these expeditions, consisting of 100 single women, set sail from New York in January 1866, and arrived in Seattle four months later. The young women were guaranteed jobs in the Washington Territory, although matrimony, clearly, was the unspoken goal of the enterprise. Ultimately all the "Mercer Girls" married except one, who remained single by choice.

Although most of the families who headed west in the wagon trains were seeking to improve their fortunes, it was generally not the poor who made the trip. It took considerable means to outfit a wagon for the journey, which took approximately five months, and to carry enough money to help the families get started in their new homes. Most of the emigrants were male farmers, skilled workers, merchants and their wives.

The trails to the Far West followed in the 1840's and 1850's usually started at some point along the Missouri River--Council Bluffs, St. Joseph or Independence--followed the Platte River to Fort Laramie (Wyoming) past Independence Rock and through the South Pass in the Rockies, which marked the Continental Divide, to Fort Hall or Fort Bridger to the south. The Oregon travelers followed the Snake River from Fort Hall, while those bound for California passed near Salt Lake City through desert and followed the Humboldt River, at the end of which rose the Sierra Range and finally the glowing California valleys.

Like Narcissa Whitman, many other women pioneers seemed to be aware of the significance of being among the first, and took the trouble to record their impressions and feelings as well as accounts of their daily activities in diaries and letters kept during the long trek and in their new homes. These firsthand accounts have provided us with a rich and vivid record of life in the West.

In a letter back East from Kansas in 1857, a settler named Julia Lovejoy vividly described a pioneer woman on her way to a new home:

> With oxen duly equipped, attached to a huge baggage wagon, the wife mounts to her elevated seat and begins her toilsome journey! A "wee bit" of space only is allotted to her comfort, for the household goods must occupy all but just room for her to sit, without changing her position in the least for rest--the "goods" towering over her head from a dizzy height, and threatening an avalanche if any of the fixings should give way, a basket of potatoes to rest her feet upon--in her arms a child not quite two years old; in one hand an umbrella to screen her throbbing head from the oppressive heat of the sun and in the other a bundle of sundries that could find no place secure from falling overboard, from the rocking to and fro of the ponderous vehicle.[14]

The presence of numbers of women and children in the wagon trains brought a certain homelike quality to the life of the trail. When the "men were accompanied by wife and children," wrote Sarah Royce, who traveled to California in 1849, "their wagons were easily distinguished by the greater number of conveniences and household articles they carried, which...were often disposed about the outside of the wagon in a homelike way. And, where bushes, trees or logs formed partial enclosures, a kitchen or sitting room quite easily suggested itself to a feminine heart, yearning for home."[15] Another western traveler, Catherine Haun, pointed out that although caravans carrying a good many women and children probably took longer on the journey, the women "exerted a good influence, as the men did not take such risks with the Indians,...were more alert about the care of the teams, and seldom had accidents; more attention was paid to cleanliness and sanitation and lastly,...the meals were more regular and better cooked thus preventing much sickness and there was less waste of food."[16]

Although books of advice to travelers to the West recommended that women wear "hunting frocks, loose pantaloons, men's hats and shoes," most of them did not heed this advice, but preferred to keep up a ladylike appearance on the trail. Catherine Haun, for example "wore a dark woolen dress" and "was never without an apron and a three cornered shoulder kerchief."

Most of the women grew accustomed to cooking out of doors, most of the time using buffalo chips for fuel, since wood was scarce and unobtainable for most of the trip. Because milk was scarce and much desired, some of the emigrants took along recently calved cows for their milk. Fresh buffalo meat was the main fare on the prairies, supplemented by the travelers' own supplies of rice, hard biscuits and dried fruits. Laundry posed a problem on the trail, since most stops were overnight only, not long enough for clothing to dry. Furthermore, the harsh alkaline water along much of the route was unsuitable for cleaning people and clothing. Most of the women welcomed the arrival at Fort Laramie, which was generally a few days' stopover.

Women were in charge of their children and had to be careful lest they fall off the wagons and get trampled under the wagon wheels or the hoofs of the cattle, a mishap that occasionally happened. At times when the trail got too rough to ride in the wagons, the women rode horse- or mule-back, generally carrying their babies in front of them. Sarah Royce described riding mule-back through the Sierras:

> I must have Mary in front of me, and, it turned out, that several things needed for frequent use would have to be suspended from the pommel of my saddle, in a satchel on one side and a little pail on the other. At first, I was rather awkward, and so afraid Mary would get hurt, that at uneven places in the road I would ask my husband to get up and take her, while I walked.[17]

In addition to their traditional domestic duties, women on the western trail also shared in the work of the men, particularly the care of the cattle and horses. Lydia Waters, a traveler across the plains in 1855, describes a typical daily task with classic understatement:

> Early in the morning of May 15 we began yoking the oxen. There were twenty head and two cows, and only one pair had ever been yoked before. It was a great undertaking and it was four o'clock in the afternoon before it was done.[18]

Women also participated in the strenuous task of shoeing the cattle when their hoofs became worn down:

> To shoe the cattle a trench the length of the animal and the width and depth of the shovel was dug. The animal was then thrown and rolled over so that all four of its legs were up in the air. In this position it was helpless and the shoes were nailed on readily.[19]

Women usually helped to drive the loose cattle and horses, walking behind them with clouds of dust in their faces.

Despite the hardships, however, there were pleasant moments along the way. Catherine Haun remembered the socializing with other women that took place during the "nooning" hour, or after the wagon train had stopped for the day:

> During the day we womenfolk visited from wagon to wagon or congenial friends spent an hour walking, ever westward, and talking over our home life back in "the states"; telling of loved ones left behind; voicing our hopes for the future in the Far West and even whispering a little friendly gossip of emigrant life. High teas were not popular but tatting, knitting, crocheting, exchanging receipts for cooking beans or dried apples or swapping food for the sake of variety kept us in practice of feminine occupations and diversions.[20]

In the evening, when not too fearful of Indian intrusions, the men and women would gather around the campfire, possibly betting how many miles they had covered during the day, telling stories and singing.

Most of the women eagerly noted the landmarks of the western crossing: Chimney Rock, an enormous natural tower in the desert, which could be seen many miles before and after it was passed; Fort Laramie, which provided a welcome stop for rest and refreshment, and where the tired women of the trail could see the "officers' wives, children and nurses gaily dressed and out walking"; and the famous Independence Rock, upon which thousands of emigrants wrote their names and dates of passage. The women were also quick to note the beauty of the scenery. Traveling along the Platte River route, which was 100 feet in 1855, Lydia Waters remarked that "the grass had been killed by travel, but along it for nearly a hundred miles was the most beautiful bed of flowers, portulaca in bunches four feet high, and a great variety of other flowers."[21] Sarah Royce was probably expressing the feelings of many trail-worn women at the first glimpse of the "promised land" of California. Hastening ahead of the other members of her party, she wrote:

> I was rewarded by coming out, in advance of all the others, on a rocky height whence I looked <u>down</u>, far over constantly descending hills, to where a soft haze sent up a warm rosy glow that seemed to me a smile of welcome; while beyond occasional faint outlines of other mountains appeared; and I knew I was looking across the Sacramento Valley.[22]

AT HOME IN THE WEST

While most of the men dreamed of making a fortune in prospecting, ranching, farming or commerce, most of the women dreamed of making a new home. "California, land of sunny skies," wrote Sarah Royce, "that was my first look into your

smiling face. I loved you from that moment, for you seemed to welcome me with a loving look into rest and safety. However brave a face I might have put on most of the time, I knew my coward heart was yearning all the while for a home-nest and a welcome into it, and you seemed to promise me both." For Royce, the home-nest in California, in the early years, turned out to be a tent in a mining camp. Before very long, however, her passion for domesticity had transformed the space inside the tent into different areas, including a "parlor" which she ingeniously furnished with shelves and a table holding their few precious books, several "ottomans" made out of rough boxes, stuffed and covered with plush, a rocking chair, carpeting and a melodeon, which had been brought around Cape Horn and was said to be the first one ever brought to California.

While Sarah Royce settled for a tent as her first home, women in other parts of the West had to be content with equally primitive dwellings--rude cabins, sod houses, even teepees. Julia Lovejoy, an emigrant to Kansas during the 1850's, wrote home to New Hampshire:

> How full of change is life! More than two years ago we found ourselves suddenly removed from a dear little cottage nestled in the green hills of New England, to a floorless, windowless cabin, on a vast expanse, where but one other of like stamp with our own appeared to break the monotony of the view.[23]

Some women never quite got over the shock of the first sight of their new home. Anna Howard Shaw, who became a doctor, minister and prominent suffragist, spent a pioneer girlhood in the woods of northern Michigan. In her autobiography, The Story of a Pioneer, she describes her arrival at the log cabin that her father and older brother had built to stake their claim:

> What we found awaiting us were the four walls and the roof of a good-sized log house, standing in a small cleared strip of wilderness, its doors and windows represented by square holes, its floor also a thing of the future, its whole effect achingly forlone and desolate....I shall never forget the look my mother turned upon the place. Without a word she crossed the threshold and, standing very still, looked slowly around her. Then something within her seemed to give way and she sank upon the floor. She could not realize even then, I think, that this was really the place father had prepared for us, that here he expected us to live. When she finally took it in she buried her face in her hands, and in that way she sat for hours, without speaking or moving. Her face never lost the deep lines those first hours of her pioneer life had cut upon it.[24]

On the Great Plains, where many homesteaders began settling after the Civil War, the sod house became the standard dwelling because trees were so scarce. Women accustomed to the neat New England or midwestern frame houses or the

rolling Southern landscape must have been dismayed at their first view of the squat sod houses set in what appeared to be an ocean of land. As Willa Cather, who grew up in Nebraska, described them in her novel O Pioneers!

> The dwelling-houses were set about haphazard on the tough prairie sod; some of them looked as if they had been moved in overnight, and others as if they were straying off by themselves, headed straight for the open plain. None of them had any appearance of permanence, and the howling wind blew under them as well as over them.[25]

The homesteaders used special plows to cut the sod into strips which were then cut into bricks. When the walls were two or three feet high, wood window and door frames were set in place and the rest of the walls went up around them. For the roof the settlers laid several heavy beams from one side of the house to another, over which they laid branches and other materials such as corn stalks and straw. Then came a final layer of sod bricks, with the grass side up so that it would continue to grow and hold the roof together. The settlers would usually put a layer of plaster and whitewash on the interior. The sod houses may have been homely, but they were admirably suited to the plains environment. Settlers found that the snug, dark quarters, which were warm in winter and cool in summer, were a welcome contrast to the ocean of land and sky outside the door.

Whether it was a tent, a log cabin, or a sod house, a pioneer home was usually small and cramped, with sometimes as many as 12 people sharing one room. In 1857 Julia Lovejoy of Kansas complained, "Some of the habits of western life...are truly shocking to our Yankee notions of propriety: especially when so many different sexes lodge in one room, in uncurtained beds."

WOMEN'S WORK IN THE WEST

In many respects the lives of pioneer women in the West resembled the lives of colonial women during the early years of settlement. Women were scarce and their labor was in great demand in an economy in which most necessities--clothing, food, candles, soap--had to be made from scratch, and doctors were few and far between. Narcissa Whitman had written to her sister back East, "Bring as many girls as you can, but let every young man bring a wife, for he will want one after he gets here, if he never did before." When an Illinois farmer in the 1830's was asked if he chose his wife on account of her size, he replied: "Why pretty much, I reckon women are some like horses and oxen, the biggest can do the most work, and that's what I want one for."[26] The majority of women in the West were farm wives and worked in the home where they performed the vital role in the household economy that was fast disappearing from the lives of women in the eastern cities and towns.

Western women were able to enter business enterprises and professions from which they might have been barred in the East. A number of western women turned their household skills into profitable businesses. They ran boarding

houses, took in laundry, engaged in dressmaking, millinery and baking, taking advantage of the scarcity of goods and services in pioneer communities. In 1852, a California woman reported to a Boston newspaper that she had baked and sold $18,000 worth of pies in less than a year's time, a third of which was profit.[27] Numbers of women in California and other parts of the West hoped to make fortunes from the cultivation of silkworms.

Other women, uninhibited by notions of ladylike behavior, made their living as ranchers, cowpunchers and stagecoach drivers. In New Mexico, a Chicana, Dona Candelaria Mestas, carried the mail on horseback between two New Mexican towns during the 1890's. Annie Oakley, though born in Ohio and not the Far West, became a skilled markswoman and made her name as a western heroine traveling with Buffalo Bill's Wild West show. The legendary Calamity Jane, whose real name was Martha Jane Canary, served as an army scout and pony express rider. A number of former slave women found a new way of life in the West. Mary Fields, for example, who had been a slave in Tennessee, worked as a freight hauler when she reached the West, and eventually became a stagecoach driver-mail carrier in Montana.

Movie westerns have made us familiar with the "women of easy virtue" who ran saloons and bordellos and other places of entertainment in newly settled Western towns. What is not always appreciated is that the women who ran the parlor houses, gambling halls and such played an important role in civilizing the West. Quite often their establishments were the only places on the frontier with amenities--good food, pictures on the walls, luxurious furniture and an air of comfort and elegance. Some of these women even became public benefactors of their communities. Julia Bulette, a celebrated madam of Virginia City, Nevada, was a public figure, beloved of the miners, who found her House the only place in town where they could enjoy home comforts. When she was murdered--by robbers after her jewelry--the whole town went into mourning.[28] In Santa Fe, New Mexico, a Chicana, Dona Gertrudis Bracel--known as "La Tules"--owned and managed the largest gambling hall in town. And, to the disgust of wealthy new "Anglo" settlers like Susan Magoffin, La Tules mixed with the best of Santa Fe society.[29]

As might have been expected, women of any theatrical talent were extremely popular in the women-starved mining towns. Lotta Crabtree, the daughter of an unsuccessful prospector, first appeared on the stage at the age of eight, and for thirty-five years was the innocent-looking idol of the West, singing and dancing her way to a fortune, which had grown to $4 million at the time of her death. Adah Isaacs Menken, another legendary performer, was an actress in melodramas. In her most sensational role, she captured audiences and critics--Mark Twain included--by appearing strapped to a horse's back, wearing a gauzy costume which revealed her figure. In her days of glory the dazzled miners presented her with a bar of gold bullion worth two thousand dollars as well as valuable mine stock.

Many western women were teachers, some of them lured to the frontier by those, like Catharine Beecher, who argued that American women had a duty to bring civilization to a "barbaric" region. There was also in the West a higher percentage of women in professions such as law, journalism and medicine than

in the East. A brief look at the remarkable career of Bethenia Owens-Adair, who became one of the first woman doctors in the West, shows that a woman of strength and ambition could overcome a very unpromising start in life, and work her way into a demanding profession. Bethenia Owens (1840-1926) grew up in a pioneer family in Oregon, had no formal education and was married at fourteen to a farmhand. She was divorced four years later, winning custody of her son, and from that point on struggled to support herself and him. She managed to further her education while earning money doing laundry and teaching school. For six years she ran a successful millinery and dressmaking shop, slowly accumulating enough money to undertake her main ambition--to become a doctor. She succeeded eventually in earning a medical degree from the University of Michigan and by 1881 had established a practice back in Oregon. She also managed to put her son through medical school. As if a professional career were not enough, Bethenia Owens-Adair was also an active worker for the causes of temperance and women's suffrage. In the latter cause, she worked closely with the most well known suffrage leader in the Northwest--Abigail Scott Duniway.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE WEST

Many of the pioneer men and women brought with them the attitudes that kept women subordinate to men; but the conditions of western life--the scarcity of women, their economic importance, their relative freedom to try new roles--broke down many of these attitudes. The West became the first region in the United States in which women were granted political rights, although not without struggle and organization. Abigail Scott Duniway (1834-1915), who gave help and encouragement to Bethenia Owens-Adair and other women, and who herself experienced the hardships as well as the economic opportunities of the pioneer woman's life, became the outstanding suffrage leader of the Northwest.

In 1852, when she was 17, Abigail Scott's father, an Illinois farmer, caught "a new installment of western fever" and took his family--an invalid wife and nine children--to Oregon by covered wagon. Abigail's mother died of cholera during the 2,400-mile trek, and her three-year-old brother died en route as well. After a brief stint of schoolteaching, she married a young rancher and farmer and quickly settled down to the life of pioneer farm wife in an almost all-male community. In her autobiography, Pathbreaking, Duniway describes the strenuous routine of her early married life:

> It was a hospitable neighborhood composed chiefly of bachelors who found comfort in mobilizing at meal times at the homes of the few married men of the township, and seemed especially fond of congregating at the hospitable cabin home of my good husband, who was never quite so much in his glory as when entertaining them at his fireside, while I, if not washing, scrubbing, churning, or nursing the baby, was preparing their meals in our lean-to kitchen. To bear two children in two and a half years from my marriage day, to make thousands

> of pounds of butter every year for market, not including what was used in our free hotel at home; to sew and cook, and wash and iron; to bake and clean and stew and fry; to be, in short, a general pioneer drudge, with never a penny of my own, was not pleasant business for an erstwhile school teacher.[30]

The difficulties of a woman's lot were further brought home to Duniway when they lost their farm because her husband had signed notes for a friend, without her consent, and the friend defaulted. Not long after this disaster, Ben Duniway was disabled in an accident, and the support of the family rested upon his wife. She taught school until she had enough money to start her own millinery and notions store. And it was as a shopkeeper that she witnessed a number of incidents which made her aware of the powerlessness of women under the law. She saw a woman whose husband had bought a handsome racehorse with her "butter money" deprived of enough money to clothe her children properly; and a woman whose husband had sold all the household possessions and then deserted her. With the help of her husband, Duniway became convinced that only having the vote would remedy the injustices suffered by women. In 1871, she moved her family to Portland, where she founded a weekly newspaper, New Northwest, devoted to women's rights, which circulated in Washington, Oregon and Idaho. She was one of the founders of the Oregon Equal Suffrage Association, and traveled extensively throughout the Northwest lecturing and lobbying for suffrage. Appropriately, Abigail Duniway wrote the Oregon suffrage law, which was finally passed in 1912.

In other parts of the West equal suffrage was achieved earlier, and with far less effort, than in any other part of the United States. In 1869, the same year that the organized suffrage movement was getting started in the East, the issue was quietly introduced in the territory of Wyoming. The person generally credited with being the moving spirit behind the suffrage victory in this sparsely populated territory was Esther Morris, a forceful woman of 55, who had followed her husband and grown sons to the gold rush settlement of South Pass City in 1869. The story goes that she gave a tea party on the eve of the first territorial election, and invited both Republican and Democratic candidates for the legislature. She then succeeded in having both candidates promise to introduce a women's suffrage bill in the legislature. The winning candidate did introduce such a bill, it passed the legislature on December 10, 1869, and was signed by the governor, though pressure was put on him to veto it. At the same time, the Wyoming legislature passed laws giving women control of their own property and guaranteeing them equal pay as schoolteachers. In the spring of 1870, Wyoming women were called to serve jury duty, another novelty for women. As a further indication of the esteem in which women were held, Esther Morris was appointed Justice of the Peace. Though eastern newspapers saw fit to print cartoons ridiculing this appointment, Morris performed her duties competently, and none of the forty cases she heard was ever reversed.

When Wyoming applied for statehood in 1889, there was some opposition in the House of Representatives because of the equal suffrage law. The Wyoming legislature did not back down, but sent a telegram to their Washington repre-

sentative declaring : "We may stay out of the Union a hundred years, but we will come in with our women." It was admitted by a narrow margin in both House and Senate.

After Wyoming, the territory of Utah was the next to grant equal suffrage to its women--in February 1870. At that time the Mormon practice of polygamy, or plural marriage--one man having more than one wife--was under attack in the U.S. Congress. It is quite possible that by granting women their vote, the Mormon men hoped to have the full support of Mormon women in protesting the bill which proposed to outlaw polygamy. In 1887 Congress passed a law making polygamy illegal and, unfairly, revoking suffrage in Utah. Women did not regain the vote there until Utah was admitted as a state in 1896.

Whatever the reasons--the scarcity of women, their economic importance, the egalitarian frontier spirit--the western states continued to lead the rest of the country in the granting of political rights to women. Idaho and Colorado were the first states in which women's suffrage was won by state referendum before 1900. Women were active in Populist Party politics in Kansas and other farm states during the 1890's. The majority of states that adopted women's suffrage through state referendums before the federal amendment was passed in 1919 were west of the Mississippi. It should be no surprise, then, that a western state, Montana, would be the first to elect a woman--Jeannette Rankin--to the U.S. Congress in 1916.

NOTES

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2. Ibid., p. 203.

3. Meriwether Lewis, *The Lewis and Clark Expedition,* in three volumes (1814; Philadelphia and New York, 1961) vol. III, p. 780.

4. Clifford M. Drury, *Marcus and Narcissa Whitman and the Opening of Old Oregon,* in two volumes (Glendale, California, 1973) vol. I, p. 162.

5. Ibid., p. 183.

6. Ibid., p. 184.

7. Ibid., p. 187.

8. Ibid., p. 195.

9. Ibid., p. 207.

10. Ibid., p. 208.

11. Nancy Cott, ed., *Root of Bitterness: Documents of the Social History of American Women* (paperback, New York, 1972) p. 231. Excerpt is from "Letters of Mrs. Marcus Whitman," *Transactions* of the 19th Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association for 1891.

12. Clifford M. Drury, *First White Women Over the Rockies: Diaries, Letters and Biographical Sketches of the Journey, 1836-1844* (Glendale, California, 1963) Vol. II, pp. 269, 292, 319.

13. Georgia Willis Read, "Women and Children on the California-Oregon Trail in the Gold Rush," *Missouri Historical Review*, 39 (October 1944) p. 6.

14. Julia L. Lovejoy, "Letters," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 15 (1947) p. 302.

15. Sarah Royce, *A Frontier Lady: Recollections of the Gold Rush and Early California* (New Haven, 1932) pp. 8-9.

16. Read, "Women and Children," pp. 8-9.

17. Royce, *A Frontier Lady*, p. 67.

18. Lydia Waters, "Account of a Trip Across the Plains in 1855," *Society of California Pioneers Quarterly*, 6 (1929) p. 59.

19. Ibid., p. 64.

20. Read, "Women and Children," p. 9.

21. Waters, "Account of a Trip," p. 64.

22. Royce, *A Frontier Lady*, pp. 72-73.

23. Lovejoy, "Letters," p. 300.

24. Anna Howard Shaw, *The Story of a Pioneer* (New York, 1915) pp. 24-26.

25. Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!* (Boston, 1913) p. 3.

26. Eliza W. Farnham, *Life in Prairie Land* (1855; hardcover reprint, Nieuwkoop, Holland, 1972) p. 38.

27. Dee Brown, *The Gentle Tamers* (1958; paperback ed., New York, 1974) p. 228.

28. Ibid., pp. 64-68.

29. Martha P. Cotera, *Diosa y Hembra: The History and Heritage of Chicanas in the U.S.* (Austin, Texas, 1976) pp. 58-59.

30. Abigail Scott Duniway, *Pathbreaking: An Autobiographical History of the Equal Suffrage Movement in Pacific Coast States* (1914; paperback reprint, New York, 1971) pp. 9-10.

Questions for Inquiry and Discussion

1. List the main contributions of Sacajawea to the Lewis and Clark expedition. How does the Sacajawea legend differ from the historical Sacajawea?

2. What is significant about the achievement of Narcissa Whitman and Eliza Spalding? According to Narcissa Whitman's letters, what were some of the hardships and delights of the journey across the Rockies? How did the missionary women in Oregon cope with the problems of being wives and mothers, isolated from one another in the wilderness?

3. In what ways did women who went west as pioneers also travel backward in time to an earlier kind of household economy? Which passage in the chapter best illustrates the kind of drudgery performed by pioneer women?

4. It has been said that men explored the West, but women settled and civilized it. The West could be liberating for women. List examples of the economic opportunities that some women found in the growing western communities. List some of the conditions of western life that encouraged equality between the sexes. Which states or territories were the first to grant women's suffrage?

Optional Activity

Memoirs, diaries and letters of pioneer women are abundant, probably because these women knew that they were doing something important and felt the impulse to record it. Read at least one firsthand account of a pioneer woman, and make a selection of passages that seem to highlight her experiences. (A number of these books are mentioned in the Bibliography.)

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROGRESS OF WOMEN AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

The Civil War, violent as it was, did not radically change the Victorian concept of womanhood. American women still wore tight corsets and long, heavy skirts and were guided by a strict code of "proper" behavior, which perhaps was ignored in the frontier West. Popular novels, sermons and magazines were still telling them that their sphere was the home, and their mission to be mothers of civilization.

Beneath a surface continuity with the prewar period, however, things were changing for women as a result of the pressure of economic necessity and the efforts of forceful women who insisted on widening the scope of their life choices. Although women were still excluded from any leadership role in the nation's political life, they were participating more actively in other areas--industry, education, the professions and women's organizations (see Chapter Five). The progress they made resulted from a combination of the individual achievements of a number of outstanding individuals and the collective efforts of masses of anonymous women.

WORK FOR WAGES

"Aunt Betsey, there's going to be a new Declaration of Independence," gravely declares Christie Devon, the young heroine of Louisa May Alcott's novel Work (1873). "I mean," she explains to her startled aunt, "that being of age, I'm going to take care of myself, and not be a burden any longer." Christie, as her author describes her, "was one of that large class of women who, moderately endowed with talents, earnest and truehearted, are driven by necessity, temperament or principle out into the world to find support, happiness, and homes for themselves."[1] Christie then embarks, as Alcott herself had done in the years before her literary success with Little Women (1868), on a series of jobs representing most of the occupations open to a young woman equipped with only domestic skills--servant, actress, governess, companion, seamstress. The fact that Christie is, at one point, almost driven to suicide by her struggles suggests that in the mid-19th century, American society did not place much value on women's labor outside the home, though it willingly exploited it.

After the Civil War, which had accelerated industrial development, thousands of women--by choice and necessity--sought work for wages outside the home. Like Christie, the majority of working women were young and single, filling the years between school and marriage, which was the goal of most women. Other women who worked were widows and wives whose husbands failed to support them. Black women and immigrants also formed a large part of the female labor force.

As had been the case before the Civil War, most women industrial workers were employed in light industries: cloth making, needle trades, tobacco, shoe making, food processing, laundries and printing. For the most part their jobs

required little skill, paid low wages and provided few chances for advancement. Women who sewed for a living tended to be the worst off because there were so many of them. They earned starvation wages and sometimes could not collect even these meager sums from unscrupulous employers. It was no wonder that some were driven to prostitution or, like Christie Devon, were tempted by suicide.

The years after the Civil War saw an enormous increase of women in white-collar occupations--clerks, secretaries, switchboard operators, salesclerks in retail stores. Women flocked to Washington, D.C., where they found jobs as office workers in the different departments of the federal government. They bound government reports and stamped them with gold leaf at the Government Printing Office; and at the Treasury Department they cut currency, prepared statistical reports, identified mutilated currency and detected counterfeit money.

Aside from industrial work, teaching was the occupation that employed the largest number of women. By 1890, women teachers outnumbered men by about two to one. They taught in one-room schoolhouses in rural areas and in big city school systems, and as a rule were paid one-half to one-third the salaries of men. Many teachers had very little schooling themselves; in 1907, Indiana became the first state to require that licensed teachers have a high school diploma. The majority of women teachers were young and single, and in most places were obliged to quit when they got married.

Nursing, the other "women's profession," was just beginning to be respectable after the Civil War, in which women had played so outstanding a role as nurses. It was a poorly paid profession, and the training was usually acquired on the job in the hospital. The first professional training programs for nurses were established in the 1870's by Dr. Susan Dimock of Connecticut, and then in turn by her student, Linda Richards, a woman who devoted her life to nurses' training.

ADVANCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Mary Lyon, the pioneer founder of Mt. Holyoke in the 1830's, would have rejoiced had she lived to see the widening of educational opportunities for women after the Civil War. Vassar, Wellesley and Smith--women's colleges with high standards and stiff entrance requirements--were founded in the 1860's and 1870's, while a number of men's colleges, particularly the land-grant or state institutions of the Middle West, opened their doors to women. This does not mean that masses of American women suddenly started going to college. A woman who sought a college education was still considered "strong-minded" and unconventional. (She also tended to be middle class and of old American rather than immigrant stock.) In 1890, only 2,700 women graduated from college, not a very large number considering that higher education had by this time been available for over fifty years. However, the college-educated women of the 1880's and 1890's and the early 20th century, seeking to use their education, would have an important influence on public life, and on other women, far out of proportion to their numbers.

A number of women college graduates found exciting careers for themselves as missionaries, both at home among the Indians and abroad in Asia and Africa. Sent out by the Protestant churches, American women missionaries served as doctors, teachers and school founders in India, China, Syria, Turkey and many other countries, often providing the best health care and education available at the time in those areas. One such woman was Clara Swain, from Elmira, New York, who attended the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania in the 1860's. As a medical missionary in India, she opened what was probably the first hospital for women in that country. In societies where women were treated cruelly, missionary women frequently became their champions and tried to emancipate them. In China, for example, female missionaries led the fight against footbinding.

PIONEERS IN THE MALE-DOMINATED PROFESSIONS

The Declaration of Sentiments drawn up at the first women's rights convention at Seneca Falls protested against the exclusion of women from the professions of law, medicine, and the ministry. In the years immediately before and after the Civil War, a handful of determined women penetrated these male-dominated fields and by 1890, several hundred women had achieved professional status. Although only a tiny minority of American women (today we might call them "token" women), these pioneers proved to society that women were not lacking the brains, sense of responsibility and creativity to succeed in professional work.

Medicine

Oddly enough, the strongest resistance to female participation was in the field of medicine, in which women had been active practitioners before the 19th century. The first woman to cross the barriers erected by the male medical establishment needed an iron will and nerves of steel as well as scientific aptitude. English-born Elizabeth Blackwell (1821-1910), the first woman in America to earn a medical degree, came from a family in which women's rights was a sacred cause. Although she was at first repelled by the thought of studying the human body, she was attracted to the "moral struggle" of winning a medical degree. She refused the suggestion of a well-meaning doctor that she apply to medical school disguised as a man.

After being rejected by all twenty-nine of the medical schools she applied to, Blackwell was admitted to Geneva College in New York only after her application had been referred to the students, who thought it would be a good joke to admit a woman. As she walked to her classes in Geneva, the townspeople stared at her and avoided her as if she were either a "bad woman" or "insane." She wrote in her journal of her fight to be admitted to classroom demonstrations:

> November 15, [1847]--To-day, a second operation at which I was not allowed to be present. This annoys me. I was quite saddened and discouraged by Dr. Webster requesting me to be absent from some of his demonstrations. I don't believe it is his wish. I wrote to him hoping to change things.[2]

Aware of the curiosity of her fellow students, Blackwell had to mask her true feelings as she witnessed a dissection:

> November 22, [1847]-- A trying day, and I feel almost worn out, though it was encouraging too, and in some measure a triumph; but 'tis a terrible ordeal! That dissection was just as much as I could bear. Some of the students blushed, some were hysterical, not one could keep in a smile, and some who I am sure would not hurt my feelings for the world if it depended on them, held down their faces and shook. My delicacy was certainly shocked, and yet the exhibition was in some sense ludicrous. I had to pinch my hand till the blood nearly came, and call on Christ to help me from smiling, for that would have ruined everything; but I sat in grave indifference, though the effort made my heart palpitate most painfully.[3]

Her quiet determination soon won the respect of fellow students, and she graduated at the top of her class in 1849.

Since most medical training in America at that time was brief and inadequate, Elizabeth Blackwell then went abroad to receive advanced training in England and France. There she lost the sight of one eye from a disease contracted from a patient whom she was treating. Returning to New York in 1851, she met every possible discouragement: city hospitals barred her and no one would rent her consulting rooms. In 1853 she opened a small dispensary, which she eventually expanded into the New York Infirmary for Women and Children. This hospital was completely staffed by women, including Elizabeth's sister, Emily Blackwell, who had just completed her own struggle for a medical degree, and the Polish-born midwife and doctor Marie Zakrzewska, who later founded the New England Hospital for Women and Children in Boston. The female staff of the New York Infirmary commanded the support of respected physicians.

During the Civil War, Elizabeth Blackwell initiated the relief association that led to the founding of the U.S. Sanitary Commission. And, along with her sister, she undertook the task of training nurses to serve in the military hospitals.

Having experienced all the obstacles facing aspiring women doctors, Dr. Blackwell hoped to ease the way for others. She founded, in 1868, the Woman's College of the New York Infirmary. The school had entrance examinations, a three-year course and clinical training. In 1869, she returned to England, where for the rest of her life she furthered the cause of women's medical training and made her opinions known on a variety of medical and reform issues. Dr. Blackwell's most important contribution to the medical practice of her time was her emphasis on sanitation, hygiene and preventive care.

Elizabeth Blackwell began the long struggle of women doctors for professional recognition. Others, like Mary Putnam Jacobi (1842-1906), consolidated the gains. She was drawn to a medical career because of a strong

interest in science. After studying at the best schools available to her in America, Mary Putnam sailed to France, in 1866, where she was the first woman to gain admittance to the Ecole de Medecine in Paris; in 1871, she graduated with honors. Upon her return to America that year, she threw her energies into a variety of medical activities: publishing papers on different branches of medicine, teaching women medical students, founding a pediatric service, organizing the Association for the Advancement of Women in Medicine. Mary Putnam also managed successfully to combine a career with marriage and family life. In 1873, she married Abraham Jacobi, a doctor who supported her career ambitions. The couple had three children.

By the late 1870's, Dr. Putnam Jacobi had been admitted to numerous medical societies in recognition of her educational background, published papers and skills as a practitioner. Among her concerns were the environmental conditions that caused disease. A feminist as well as a physician, she wrote articles attacking the view prevalent among men doctors that women's intellectual development would interfere with their reproductive powers and turn them into invalids. By her own example, she did much to dispel the myth that women were biologically and intellectually incapable of being doctors. During the 1890's, Mary Putnam Jacobi worked actively for women's suffrage.

Law

It was somewhat easier for a woman to learn law than medicine, because in the 19th century it was possible to "read law" with a lawyer, rather than go to law school. However, the aspiring female attorney encountered opposition when she applied for a license to the Supreme Court of her state. State legislatures tended to be less tradition bound than the courts on this issue, and between 1870 and 1890 all the states admitted women to the bar.

Two of the most outstanding pioneer women lawyers, Myra Bradwell and Belva Lockwood, devoted much of their time and talents to removing the legal disabilities under which women still suffered. They were also familiar figures in the women's suffrage movement. Myra Bradwell (1831-1894), who was active in the Sanitary Commission during the Civil War, undertook the study of law under the guidance of her husband, an influential lawyer and judge in Cook County, Illinois. In 1868 she began to publish a weekly legal newspaper, The Chicago Legal News, which soon became the most important legal journal in the Middle West. In 1869 she applied to the Illinois Supreme Court to be admitted to the bar and was turned down on the grounds that she was a woman, even though a woman had been admitted to the Iowa bar earlier that year. In refusing Bradwell her license, the Court insisted that it was merely following tradition and that it was the province of the legislature, not the courts, to initiate reforms that would bring women into the same spheres of action as men:

> This step, if taken by us, would mean that in the opinion of this tribunal, every civil office in this State may be filled by women--that it is in harmony with the spirit of our Constitution and laws that women should be made governors, judges and sheriffs. This we are not yet prepared to hold.[4]

Myra Bradwell appealed the decision to the United States Supreme Court, which eventually upheld the lower court's decision, declaring the licensing of lawyers a matter for the states to decide. In 1872 the Illinois legislature passed an act guaranteeing the right of women to enter the professions, but Bradwell did not reapply. Instead, she continued to publish the Legal News and worked to ensure that the Illinois legislature would pass a number of bills removing women's legal disabilities. She was admitted to the Illinois bar in 1890, and in 1892 was admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Belva Lockwood (1830-1917) chose Washington, D.C., as the scene of her efforts to receive a legal education and practice law. When she first applied to the law school of Columbian College, she was turned down on the grounds that she was likely "to distract the attention of the young men." Finally admitted to the new National University Law School, she completed the course in 1873 only to have her diploma delayed. Only after she had written a letter of protest to President Grant was she granted her diploma and admitted to the District of Columbia bar.

When one of the cases Lockwood was handling came before the federal Court of Claims, she was denied the right to plead on the grounds that she was a woman. "For the first time in my life," she wrote later, "I began to realize that it was a crime to be a woman."[5] Two years later, in 1876, her petition to the Supreme Court to practice at its bar was similarly refused. Undaunted, Lockwood energetically lobbied in Congress for a bill stating that a woman qualified for admission to the highest court in her state or in the District of Columbia could be admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court. Such a bill was passed in 1879.

At the same time that she handled her law practice, Belva Lockwood worked to secure the passage of laws improving women's property rights in the nation's capital and giving women government employees equal pay for equal work. She appeared at women's suffrage conventions and in 1884, hoping to publicize the cause, she ran for president as the "National Equal Rights Party" candidate, a campaign that did not have the support of the regular suffrage leaders such as Susan B. Anthony.

Science

The achievements of a number of outstanding women in scientific fields gradually undermined the widely held notion that women's brains could not cope with mathematics or science. Maria Mitchell (1818-1889), who won worldwide fame as an astronomer well before the Civil War, was unusually fortunate in having grown up in her chosen field by virtue of her family circumstances and place of birth:

> It was in the first place, a love of mathematics, seconded by my sympathy with my father's love for astronomical observation. But the spirit of the place had also much to do with the early bent of my mind in this direction. In Nantucket people quite generally are in the habit of observing the heavens, and a sextant will be found in almost every house.[6]

While her father made stellar observations for the whaling fleet from the roof of their Nantucket home, Mitchell, still a child, helped him record the observations.

After leaving school at sixteen, she taught school for several years before becoming the librarian of the Nantucket Atheneum, an ideal post which allowed her time to study on her own, and to continue to "sweep the skies" with her father. On October 1, 1847, she discovered a comet, which was subsequently named for her. Among the honors this discovery brought her were a gold medal from the King of Denmark and, in 1848, election to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Boston. She was the first woman to receive that honor.

Although Maria Mitchell's path to scientific achievement had been relatively smooth, she recognized that society did not encourage a questioning, skeptical mind in women. "Women, more than men," she said, were "bound by tradition and authority." Yet she believed that women had a natural aptitude for scientific pursuits which needed only encouragement to blossom:

> Observations of this kind--astronomical--are peculiarly adapted to women. Indeed, all astronomical observing seems to be so fitted. The training of a girl fits her for delicate work. The touch of her fingers upon the delicate screws of an astronomical instrument might become wonderfully accurate in results; a woman's eyes are trained to nicety of color. The eye that directs a needle in the delicate meshes of embroidery, will equally well bisect a star with the spider-web of the micrometer. Routine observations, too, dull as they are, are less dull than the endless repetition of the same pattern in crochet-work.[7]

In 1865 Mitchell became a professor of astronomy and head of the observatory at newly opened Vassar College. She tried to instill in her students the intellectual discipline as well as the questioning attitude toward authority necessary for original scientific work. Many of the leading women scientists of the next generation came under Maria Mitchell's influence at Vassar.

Ellen Swallow Richards (1842-1911), for example, was inspired by Maria Mitchell and other teachers at Vassar to pursue a career in chemistry. The first woman to be admitted to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, or as far as she knew to "any scientific school," she sought to put her training in chemistry to practical use. Her twin interests were the improvement of the environment through science and the development of scientific education for women. She established a Woman's Laboratory at M.I.T. and helped prepare the students admitted to it. In the laboratory she carried on the testing of food, fabrics and water, as well as common household products such as soda, vinegar and detergents, for state agencies and private industry. In 1884 she was appointed instructor of sanitary chemistry and conducted a survey of Massachusetts' inland waters. Somewhat later, she taught sanitary engineering--the analysis of water, sewage and air. This was a new field in which she was a pioneer and in which she trained students who would become leaders in public sanitation.

Richards firmly believed that science could make the home a better place and solve some of the problems of the larger community. Women would be better homemakers, she thought, if equipped with a knowledge of nutrition, sanitation, hygiene, ventilation and such mechanical aids as vacuum cleaners, water heaters, gas stoves and showers. Through her efforts on all levels of education--secondary, college, adult--she virtually created the field of modern home economics, working out the basic courses of study to be used both in schools and in organizations like the women's clubs. Somewhat like Catharine Beecher before her, Ellen Swallow Richards used her gifts as an educator to carve out a distinct professional field for women, related to the home.

Architecture

Catharine Beecher was a forerunner not only of home economists, but of female architects as well. Her massive work The American Woman's Home (1869), written with her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe, contained detailed designs and floor plans of ideal homes. Given the complete identification of women and the home promoted by Beecher and others, it is natural to suppose that architecture, particularly the design of homes, should have been a "woman's profession." This was not the case.

Architecture became a profession with its own standards in 1857, with the founding of the American Institute of Architects. The years immediately following the Civil War saw the founding of schools of architecture and of important departments of architecture in such schools as M.I.T. Although a handful of women were to be found in the profession from its beginnings, it was generally regarded as a "masculine" field, and women were largely discouraged from practicing it. Until the 1880's, they were not admitted to architecture schools.

A number of early women architects learned their trade through apprenticeships to men. Louise Blanchard Bethune (1856-1913), the first professional woman architect, for example, worked as a draftsperson and studied architecture for several years in the offices of two different architects, until she mastered the trade. In October 1881, she opened an office in Buffalo with a colleague she had met during her apprenticeship. The partners were married several months later, and the firm name became R.A. and L. Bethune. (This was an early example of the husband-wife partnerships that were to become quite typical in the architecture field.)

Their firm built a wide variety of public buildings: a church, brick factory, storage building, bank, blocks of store buildings and a 225-room hotel. Louise Bethune planned a large number of school buildings, most of them in western New York. She disagreed with the notion that women were best suited to designing homes, and regarded domestic design as "the most pottering and worst-paid work an architect ever does." However, her firm did design a number of single dwellings and apartment houses. In 1888, she was elected to the American Institute of Architects, its first woman member.

As a professional, Louise Bethune had mastered not only architectural design, but also the practical details of superintending construction--what she

called the "brick-and-mortar-rubber-boot-and-ladder-climbing period of investigation."[8] She realized that women would have to be proficent in this area in order to conquer those skeptical of women's abilities in the field.

An opportunity for women architects to show off their talents to a wide public was provided by the World's Columbian Exposition, a World's Fair held in Chicago in 1893. In 1890, Susan B. Anthony and other feminist leaders petitioned the Senate to insist that women share in the planning of the exposition. A Board of Lady Managers was appointed, headed by Bertha Palmer, a wealthy Chicago woman. In 1891, the Board announced a competition among women architects for a Woman's Building. The building was to be the women's center for the fair, containing exhibits recording the economic, social and professional progress of women and the conditions of their lives around the world.

The first-prize winner of the competition for the Woman's Building, Sophia Hayden (1868-1953), had a short-lived career as an architect compared to Louise Bethune (who refused to submit a design because the awards given the women were less than those given the men). Born in Chile of a Spanish mother and an American father, Sophia Hayden came to live in Massachusetts at the age of six. In 1886 she entered the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and was the first woman to complete the four-year architecture course. Her design for the Woman's Building, for which she won the $1,000 first prize, was of a light-colored, classical-style building with long rows of delicate columns and arches. Still inexperienced in supervising the construction of a building, Sophia Hayden went off to Chicago to prepare working drawings and to make requested changes. Shortly after the building was completed in 1892, she had a nervous breakdown, possibly owing to the unusual pressure she was under, and was absent from the opening of the Columbian Exposition in 1893. Not long afterward she married, and never practiced architecture again.

It was inevitable that the contemporary press would use Hayden's breakdown as an occasion to question women's capacity for an architectural career. An 1892 editorial in American Architecture and Building News read:

> It seems a question not yet answered how successfully a woman with her physical limitations can enter and engage in ...a profession which is a very wearing one. If the building of which the women seem so proud is to mark the physical ruin of its architect, it will be a much more telling argument against the wisdom of women entering this especial profession than anything else could be.[9]

Another woman architect, Minerva Parker Nichols, who had also submitted a design in the competition, argued that Hayden's illness in this unusual situation would not discourage other women from striving to become architects. She was right. During the 1880's and 1890's, increasing numbers of women trained to be architects and achieved success--a success that often owed a great deal to

the encouragement and patronage of other women. It became more and more common, for example, for wealthy women or women's organizations to make a point of commissioning a building by a woman architect.

NOTES

1. Louisa May Alcott, *Work: A Story of Experience* (1873; paperback reprint ed., New York, 1977) pp. 1, 2, 11.

2. Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, *Pioneer Work in Opening the Medical Profession to Women* (1895; paperback reprint ed., New York, 1977) p. 71.

3. Ibid., pp. 71-72.

4. Brownlee and Brownlee, eds., *Women in the American Economy*, p. 294. Excerpt is from a decision by the Illinois Supreme Court-55 Illinois 535 (1869).

5. Ibid., p. 302. Quotation is from Belva Lockwood, "My Efforts to Become a Lawyer," *Lippincotts Monthly Magazine*, Vol. 87 (February 1888) pp. 215-229.

6. Merriam, *Growing Up Female*, p. 83. Excerpt is from the diary of Maria Mitchell.

7. Ibid., p. 100.

8. Susana Torre, ed., *Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective* (New York, 1977) p. 60.

9. Ibid., p. 60.

Questions for Inquiry and Discussion

1. For women who wanted or needed to work outside the home, what were the occupational choices available to them after the Civil War? Which were new choices, and which had existed before the war? Which two occupations employed the largest number of women?

2. Discuss the characteristics of a profession. List the obstacles preventing women from entering such professions as law, medicine and architecture in the 19th century.

3. Which of the women professionals mentioned in this chapter did you admire most? Why?

4. The female pioneers in the professions were usually keenly aware of the difficulties facing aspiring women and tried to make the path easier for those who came after them. Give at least two examples of the efforts of a woman professional to encourage other women.

5. Compare the careers of Louise Bethune and Sophia Hayden, both architects. How would you account for the success of one and the failure of the other?

Optional Activity

Read a biography or an autobiography of a woman pioneer in the professions, such as Elizabeth Blackwell. Discuss the role of circumstances, such as family background, which contributed to the woman's desire to become a professional. Point out whether or not the woman was able to combine marriage with professional achievement.

CHAPTER FIVE

WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

LABOR

Toward the end of Louisa May Alcott's novel Work, the heroine, Christie Devon, attends a meeting of working women and the ladies who wished to help them:

> There were speeches of course, and of the most unparliamentary sort, for the meeting was composed almost entirely of women, each eager to tell her special grievance or theory. Any one who chose got up and spoke; and whether wisely or foolishly each proved how great was the ferment now going on, and how difficult it was for the two classes to meet and help one another in spite of the utmost need on one side and the sincerest good-will on the other. The workers poured out their wrongs and hardships passionately or plaintively, demanding or imploring justice, sympathy, and help; displaying the ignorance, incapacity, and prejudice, which make their need all the more pitiful, their relief all the more imperative.
>
> The ladies did their part with kindliness, patience, and often unconscious condescension, showing in their turn how little they knew of the real trials of the women whom they longed to serve, how very narrow a sphere of usefulness they were fitted for in spite of culture and intelligence, and how rich they were in generous theories, how poor in practical methods of relief.[1]

During the 1860's and 1870's there were meetings, such as Alcott describes, of underpaid working women and middle-class people who sympathized with their plight, in New York, Chicago, Boston and other cities. At one such meeting in New York, when the problem of securing payment for work completed was discussed, the working women exclaimed, "Oh, if we could always get paid for our work, we could get along."[2] Out of such meetings Working Women's Protective Unions were formed and continued to function into the 1890's. These organizations mainly served as legal aid societies, providing the powerless women workers with lawyers to help them collect wages from their employers. Some protective unions also found jobs for women and helped train them to fill certain jobs. They usually did not attempt to change working conditions, nor did they encourage the workers to form unions of their own. On the whole, middle-class women--with a few exceptions--tended to be removed from the problems of their working sisters.

There were several significant, but short-lived attempts by women in certain industries to form their own labor unions. One which began with high hopes and encouragement from both male unions and women suffragists was Women's

Typographical Union No. 1. This union was formed in the fall of 1868 with the cooperation of Susan B. Anthony and the Working Women's Association of New York City. Its president was Augusta Lewis, a woman who had done newspaper writing and was skilled at typesetting. Women's local No. 1 at first received the support of Men's Local No. 6 and the blessings and advice of Anthony, who promoted the union in her women's rights journal, The Revolution. At one point, in discussing the principle of equal pay for equal work, she advised the women of Local 1:

> Make up your mind to take the "lean" with the "fat," and be early and late at the case precisely as the men are. I do not demand equal pay for any women save those who do equal work in value. Scorn to be coddled by your employers; make them understand that you are in their service as workers, not as women.[3]

Augusta Lewis was also elected corresponding secretary of the National Typographical Union, and in that post surveyed the problems of women in the printing industry and reported to the union convention. She reported the discouraging situation that even though her women compositors refused to take the jobs of striking men, union foremen still did not find jobs for them:

> We are ostracized in many offices because we are members of the union; and, although the principle is right, disadvantages are so many that we cannot much longer hold together. No progress has been made in the past year. Women receive 40 cents for all kinds of work. A strike among them would prove disastrous.... It is the general opinion of female compositors that they are more justly treated by what is termed "rat" foremen, printers and employers than they are by union men.[4]

Despite its promising beginnings, Women's Local No. 1 lasted only nine years and never enlisted more than forty women.

A much larger group of working women--over 400 collar and laundry workers of Troy, New York--were organized into the Troy Collar Laundry Union during the 1860's by Kate Mullaney. These women worked over washtubs, ironing tables and starching machines in temperatures averaging 100 degrees, for wages of $2.00 and $3.00 per 12- to 14-hour week. When the laundresses union chose to strike for a wage increase, they were supported by male unions such as the Iron Molders (whom they themselves had previously supported), as well as by thousands of workers and townspeople of Troy, who held mass meetings on behalf of the women. Kate Mullaney and the union organized a cooperative collar and cuff factory. The united employers, eager to destroy the union, threatened to put paper collars on the market. Fearing for their jobs, the strikers went back to work after having first voted to dissolve their union as the employers had probably demanded.

At around the same time that the Troy collar workers union was collapsing, in 1869 the women shoe workers of Lynn, Massachusetts, were forming a union which quickly spread to other shoe manufacturing cities, and became the first

national union of women workers--the Daughters of St. Crispin. At their second national convention in 1870, the Daughters adopted a resolution demanding equal pay for equal work. In 1872, when the Lynn shoe manufacturers attempted to cut wages, the shoe binders struck. They called mass meetings to unite the women, publicized their position through the press and through their leaflets, won the support of the Knights of St. Crispin, and won their strike. Despite this brief success, however, the Daughters began to decline after 1872, like the labor movement in general, particularly during the depression of 1873. A new surge of union organizing among women would come in the 1880's, during the heyday of the Knights of Labor.

THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

The issue of votes for women was raised immediately after the Civil War when the ruling Republican Party moved to give the vote to all black men by means of the 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution. Women's rights leaders such as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucy Stone hoped that women would be enfranchised too, as a "reward" for their patriotic service during the war. When it became clear, however, that for the Republicans as well as for many former abolitionists it was the "Negro's hour," not the woman's, they were sorely disappointed. Stanton and Anthony were particularly upset that the 14th Amendment inserted the word "male" in the Constitution for the first time, used three times in connection with the term "citizen." Fearing that such an amendment would set back the cause of voting rights for women, they fought against it, earning the resentment of many of their former allies in the abolitionist camp.

The rift widened when a women's suffrage referendum and a black suffrage referendum were both defeated in Kansas in 1867. Once again, Stanton and Anthony felt that their former supporters had kept silent for fear of jeopardizing the cause of black suffrage. At this time the two women began to arouse criticism by their willingness to accept--no questions asked--the aid of anyone who rallied to the women's cause. During the Kansas campaign, and for a short time afterward, they received financial help as well as moral support from George Train, a Democrat, Irishman, financial speculator, supporter of paper money and possibly a former copperhead (Northern sympathizer with the South). Train arranged a lecture tour for Stanton and Anthony, and provided the initial money for a journal, The Revolution, to be run by the two women.

In 1869, two suffrage organizations were formed reflecting the differences in issues and personalities now dividing the former equal rights movement. The National Woman Suffrage Association, headed by Elizabeth Stanton and Susan Anthony, was a women-only organization concerned with a broad range of issues of interest to women, as well as with the demand for the vote. Stanton was not afraid to raise the controversial topics of marriage and divorce and the role of the churches in subordinating women. Anthony was one of the few suffragists to be concerned about the problems of working women, and during the late 1860's and early 1870's made some efforts to help them to organize, as we have seen with her encouragement of the Women's Typographical Union. The Boston-based American

Woman Suffrage Association, whose leading figures were Lucy Stone and Julia Ward Howe, also had men--the popular minister Henry Ward Beecher and Henry Blackwell, Lucy Stone's husband--in its leadership. The American Association focused more narrowly on the goal of suffrage than did the National, and its periodical, The Woman's Journal, spoke more to the interests of middle-class women than did The Revolution, and outlived by many years Anthony's struggling newspaper.

"The Woodhull"

During the 1870's, the National Association and the suffragist cause in general were tinged with scandal by their brief association with one of the most flamboyant women of the 19th century--Victoria Claflin Woodhull (1838-1927). Beautiful, magnetic and highly eccentric, Woodhull was one of ten children of an Ohio drifter, and had spent a wandering youth with her family, traveling through the Midwest selling fake cancer medicines and holding seances. Before her spectacular entry into public life at the age of 30, she had married and borne two children to a doctor, Canning Woodhull, divorced him and formed a liaison with a dashing Civil War veteran named Colonel Blood. When Woodhull and her sister (and partner) Tennessee Claflin, who liked to call herself Tennie C., appeared in New York in 1868, they soon caught the interest of a millionaire, Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt. With his financial backing and advice, the sisters opened a brokerage office and created a considerable stir on Wall Street. In 1870, the "bewitching brokers" began to publish their own newspaper, Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly, in which Wall Street gossip mingled with discussions of Woodhull's favorite subjects--free love, spiritualism, tax reform and, on one occasion, the Communist Manifesto. Their paper carried the motto "Upward and Onward" and later "Progress! Free Thought! Untrammeled Lives!"

Victoria Woodhull's ambition was to run for president of the United States. To pursue this goal, which had come to her in a vision, she suddenly became interested in the issue of suffrage, even though she had had no previous connection with this cause. Seizing the initiative from suffragist leaders, on January 11, 1871, she addressed the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives, presenting a "memorial" requesting Congress to legalize suffrage on the grounds that the 14th Amendment already granted women the right to vote. Out of curiosity, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Stanton were present at the hearing and were favorably impressed by "the Woodhull's" attractive but quiet and dignified appearance. They invited her to address the National Association, and somehow, before they knew it, she was threatening to take over the leadership of the movement.

At the New York gathering of the National Association in 1871, Woodhull delivered what became known as "the Great Secession Speech," in which she threatened reprisals should the next Congress fail to grant women full citizenship rights. "We mean treason," she proclaimed:

> We mean secession, and on a thousand times grander scale than that of the South. We are plotting revolution....We will call another convention expressly to frame a new constitution and to erect a new government, complete in all its parts, and to take measures to maintain it effectually as men do theirs.[5]

By May 1872, Susan B. Anthony had seen the danger of allying the women's cause with the ambitions of Victoria Woodhull, and had convinced many of the other suffragists to close ranks against her. Woodhull promptly called a convention of her followers which proclaimed her the presidential candidate of the "Equal Rights Party," with the former slave Frederick Douglass (without his knowledge or consent) named as her running mate.

At the same time that she was pursuing her political ambitions, Victoria Woodhull gave public lectures on subjects that shocked 19th century audiences and caused many to regard her as the devil in female form--"Mrs. Satan." At one such lecture, for example, entitled "Free Love, Marriage, Divorce and Prostitution," she boldly attacked marriage and divorce laws, and when a heckler asked her if she were a free lover, she replied, "Yes! I am a free lover! I have an inalienable, constitutional and natural right to love whom I may...to change that love every day if I please!"[6] She spoke out against the hypocrisy which allowed a double standard, whereby men enjoyed sexual freedom while women were denied it, and against a prudery which forbade the parts of the body from being mentioned in polite conversation. At one lecture she declared, "And this sexual intercourse business may as well be discussed now, and discussed until you are so familiar with your sexual organs that a reference to them will no longer make the blush mount to your face any more than a reference to any other part of your body."[7]

Victoria Woodhull's crusade against hypocrisy proved to be her undoing as a public figure. By charging the popular minister Henry Ward Beecher with covering up his own sexual immorality, she triggered one of the great scandals of the late 19th century--the sensational Beecher-Tilton case--and effectively ended her own career. (The scandal provided ample ammunition for those who wished to link the women's suffrage cause with immoral behavior.) Looking back at her accomplishments from the vantage point of the late 20th century, we can see that her major importance was not as a suffragist--she did little to advance that cause--but as a prophet of sexual rights for women, voicing ideas that would not be heard and generally accepted until well into the 20th century.

Women's Suffrage and the Courts

During the 1870's it was not yet apparent that suffrage would be won only by a drive for a separate constitutional amendment combined with numerous state referendum campaigns. The suffragists tried, through various demonstrations--Victoria Woodhull's "memorial" was one example--and court cases to prove that women already had the right to vote under the Constitution and existing amendments. Probably the most well known of these cases was that of Susan B. Anthony, who led a group of women in Rochester, New York, to register and vote in the presidential election of 1872.

Anthony was arrested and tried for the crime of "knowingly, wrongfully, and unlawfully [voting] for a representative to the Congress of the United States." Unfortunately for her purposes, the judge did not order her to be taken into custody, thereby robbing her of her only legal opportunity to take the case to the U.S. Supreme Court.

At around the same time, a similar case, that of Virginia Minor, a Missouri woman who had been prevented from registering to vote in 1872, was before the Supreme Court. The argument drawn up by Minor's husband, a lawyer, was that the Constitution and its amendments already gave women the right to vote. Although the states had a right to set voter qualifications, their argument ran, they did not have the right to deprive any citizen of the vote. In October 1874, the Supreme Court handed down a ruling upholding the lower court which had barred women from voting. Ignoring the basic issues of women's suffrage, the Court's decision declared that citizenship did not guarantee voting rights, and that the states were within their rights in withholding suffrage from women. These failures were an indication that time was not ripe for suffrage; the weight of tradition was still too strong with a majority of men and women. The judicial route to suffrage was a dead end, and the long legislative and political route lay ahead, its final destination fifty years in the future--years of tedious work for the committed suffragists, in order to educate the male voters and office holders and to arouse in the majority of American women the desire to vote.

For thousands of women, a political consciousness and the experience of social concern were gained not in the suffrage movement, but in two significant women's organizations that sprang up after the Civil War--the Temperance and the Women's Club movements.

TEMPERANCE: WOMEN AGAINST STRONG DRINK

Drinking was a severe problem in 19th century America, where there was no public control of the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages, and women often found themselves and their children at the mercy of drunken husbands. The early women's rights advocates had usually worked for temperance as well. In 1873, in Ohio, groups of singing and praying Protestant women began an evangelical antisaloon crusade which quickly spread through the Midwest. This crusade led to the founding of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) in 1874. Its first secretary and future president, Frances Willard (1839-1898), was to mold this organization into a uniquely effective instrument for attracting masses of women into organization work--especially in the South and Midwest. Willard conceived of the W.C.T.U. as a vehicle for promoting women's political rights as well as the prohibition of alcohol. Under her twenty-year presidency, the organization adopted the motto "Do Everything" and became involved in a broad range of reforms--labor problems, health and hygiene, social purity and women's suffrage, in addition to its central goal of temperance. She had a flair for organizing the W.C.T.U. conventions so that they became exciting spectacles complete with banners, flowers, music and inspiring speeches. She herself was capable of swaying crowds with her clear melodious voice. Many a Southern woman attributed her political awakening to Frances Willard.

Willard succeeded in attracting conservative women, normally indifferent to most social issues except temperance, and in educating them step by step to the realization that they needed political power to achieve the reforms they

sought. Although she unquestionably attracted more women than the suffrage organizations did, it can be argued that the linkage of suffrage and prohibition ultimately harmed the suffrage cause, because it aroused the anti-prohibition forces--in particular the liquor and brewing interest--to actively oppose votes for women.

WOMEN'S CLUBS

The beginning of the women's club movement is generally dated from the occasion in 1868 when Charles Dickens, on a visit to America, was guest of honor at a dinner given by the New York Press Club. A number of women journalists wished to attend, but were refused admission. One of them, Jennie Croly, decided that it was time women had their own organization and founded Sorosis, one of the first women's clubs. In the same year Julia Ward Howe and other Boston women founded the New England Women's Club and before long clubs were springing up all over the country. Some of the clubs were literary and educational, serving the needs of many women past college age for self-improvement and culture. There were clubs to discuss literature and art and flower arranging and a host of other subjects. Other clubs were more concerned with social welfare and municipal problems, foreshadowing the many reform organizations that were to emerge later in the Progressive Era. One feminist thinker, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, regarded the women's club movement as "marking...the first timid steps toward social organization of these long unsocialized members of our race." By 1890, the movement was substantial enough for its leaders, one of whom was Julia Ward Howe, to found a national organization: the General Federation of Women's Clubs.

The club movement also took root among black women. But while many of the white women's clubs pursued cultural activities alone, those of black women usually addressed themselves to the urgent needs of the black communities. As Fannie Barrier Williams, a prominent black club member, expressed in 1893, in an address entitled "The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States Since the Emancipation Proclamation":

> Benevolence is the essence of most of the colored women's organizations. The humane side of their natures has been cultivated to recognize the duties they owe to the sick, the indigent and ill-fortuned. No church, school or charitable institution for the special use of colored people has been allowed to languish or fail when the associated efforts of the women could save it.[8]

Leaders among black women were also concerned with ending the lynchings of southern black men and with defending black women from charges of immorality.

It was a sequence of events concerning the latter two issues that sparked the first national organization of black women. A southern black woman, Ida Wells-Barnett (1862-1931), had responded to the wave of lynchings of the 1890's

by carrying on an antilynching crusade in the North and Midwest, as well as in England, where antilynching societies were formed. In 1895, a white southerner, James Jacks, wrote to a British antilynching society defending the South, and accusing all negroes of immorality. The letter aroused a prominent black club leader, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, to organize a meeting of black women's clubs in Boston in July 1895. At this meeting Ruffin declared:

> Too long have we been silent under unjust and unholy charges....Year after year southern women have protested against the admission of colored women into any national organization on the ground of the immorality of these women, and because all refutation has only been tried by individual work, the charge has never been crushed, as it could and should have been at first....It is to break this silence, not by noisy protestations of what we are not, but by a dignified showing of what we are and hope to become, that we are impelled to take this step, to make of this gathering an object lesson to the world.[9]

Out of this Boston convention was born the National Federation of Afro-American Women, headed by Margaret Murray Washington, the wife of Booker T. Washington. A year later this organization of thirty-six women's clubs merged with the Colored Women's League of Washington to form the National Association of Colored Women, with Mary Church Terrel as its first president. The founding of the NACW spurred the formation of more clubs and provided leadership in the black community. Although middle-class black women held the leadership posts in the club movement, there were many poor and working women among club members, unlike the white women's club movement, which tended to be middle class in membership.

Although certain women's clubs were integrated at the local and state levels, a sense of solidarity between white and black women did not develop on the national level. Black women like Ruffin, who were sent as delegates to the General Federation of Women's Clubs, were rebuffed when they presented themselves as delegates from black clubs. In that period, the gulf between the races was still too great to be bridged by women's club activities.

SUMMING UP

By the 1890's, women as a group were about to emerge as a distinct force in American life. Although exploited, they were a significant presence in the work force and on the verge of playing a more important role in a developing trade union movement. Women college graduates, though still unusual, were no longer freaks, and were preparing to put their education to use for the betterment of society. Women professionals still numbered in the hundreds, a mere fraction of American womanhood, but the way was cleared for others to follow, and no other women would have to overcome quite the same obstacles that had confronted an Elizabeth Blackwell. The suffrage movement, though still unsuccessful,

had become thoroughly respectable, indeed, was a hobby of society women. Finally, masses of women all over the country, including the South, through such organizations as the W.C.T.U. and the Women's Clubs had learned to look beyond their homes to the larger community outside, and were developing a political consciousness. The groundwork was laid for the remarkable burst of social activity by women in the Progressive Era, as well as for knowledge of political realities that women would display in their final victorious battle for the vote.

NOTES

1. Alcott, *Work*, pp. 425-426.

2. Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, p. 133.

3. Barbara Mayer Wertheimer, *We Were There: The Story of Working Women in America* (New York, 1977) p. 168.

4. Ibid., p. 169.

5. Constance Mayfield Rourke, *Trumpets of Jubilee* (New York, 1927) p. 204.

6. Milton Rugoff, *Prudery and Passion: Sexuality in Victorian America* (New York, 1971) p. 229.

7. Ibid., p. 231.

8. Loewenberg and Bogin, eds., *Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life*, p. 274.

9. Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, p. 190.

Questions for Inquiry and Discussion

1. Describe at least one example of labor union organization among women in the 1860's or 1870's. List some of the reasons why unions of women workers were short-lived.

2. Why did Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony object to the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution? List some of the issues that caused a twenty-year rift in the women's suffrage movement.

3. A flamboyant person can help and hinder a serious movement. What effect did Victoria Woodhull have on the women's suffrage movement in the 1870's?

4. Why were the suffragists unsuccessful in winning the right to vote through the courts, as in the cases of Susan B. Anthony and Frances Minor?

5. Why was temperance primarily a "woman's issue," even though there were many men in favor of prohibiting alcohol? Demonstrate how Frances Willard used the WCTU as a vehicle for organizing masses of women on behalf of many reforms. Why was she more successful than suffragists in attracting conservative women to the suffrage cause?

6. How did the women's club movement awaken both black and white women to concerns beyond their homes and families?

Optional Activity

Victoria Woodhull has long fascinated historians and biographers. Do research into her life and write a paper about her.

Suggested topics:

1) Victoria Woodhull as the main character of a play, musical, film, or television drama. Choose the episodes from her life that would best lend themselves to dramatization.
2) Victoria Woodhull as a woman ahead of her time. Which of her ideas sound like the 20th century rather than the 19th?
3) Victoria Woodhull as a radical and free spirit. Compare her with other American women who have set their own standards of morality and behavior, such as Frances Wright, Isadora Duncan and Emma Goldman.

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